£1.45

QL S.U.B.

PERIODICAL OF QL SUPER USER BUREAU

This issue! Three

LOOK! BUMPER 44 PAGES IN THIS ISSUE

SERVICES TO SUBSCRIBERS

Services Available FREE of Charge to SUBscribers ONLY

Independent Advice
> You can rely on independent advice from us, because we specialise in supporting users, not selling products. We want to earn your trust, and become your permanent source of support. As we supply products as a service, rather than as our income, we recommend, or condemn any product on its merit, rather than its profit margins.

Telephone Helpline
> As most problems cannot be put-off until tomorrow, we offer a free telephone helpline that you can use to get solutions to problems, in most cases, immediately. It runs until early evening so you may be able to phone when you get home from work, and can have your machine to hand. Our technical staff area friendly and informed.

Support By Letter
> Some problems just can't be solved over the phone. Some products cannot be described in sufficient detail in a catalogue or a brief telephone conversation. Our individual written support is free of charge. All we require is two first class stamps or international reply coupons- a subscription does not include support postage.

Product Savings
> Glancing through the latest copy of our catalogue, you will notice that we show 4 prices per product. There is the competitive retail price; the price to subscribers in the UK; the competitive retail price to non-subscribers outside the UK, excluding VAT; and the price to subscribers outside the UK, excluding VAT. We offer savings on all products, but only to subscribers who pay either with a cheque or postal order, (due to credit card company rules). A subscription can quickly pay for itself over a year this way!

QL Bulletin Board
> Our viewdata bulletin board, run on a QL, and offering 1200/75 or 300/300 baud operation, on 0388-773737, 24 hours a day, offers you the opportunity to send and receive help via the board at anytime. Once registered on it, free of charge, you will find that over 550 pages of information are available to browse through. There is a special area for subscribers with hints and tips, and you can send us any orders by leaving a message with credit card details too!

Details of Services Available at EXTRA Charge
> Leaflets on these can be obtained (free of charge) on request- a copy detailing those now available should be included this issue. The one that may be most worth mentioning is our repair service.

QL Repair Service
> What makes our repair service different from the rest is that we guarantee your QL for a complete year, regardless of the problem. Nobody else is confident enough to cover the QL for a whole year! The fixed charge of £33 to subscribers, or £38 to non-subscribers is small for the peace of mind you get. Our "no hidden extras" fee includes insured return postage, but not postage to us. Repairs usually take up to 2 weeks because to be able to offer such a long guarantee, all QLs undergo a "soak-test". Our service does not, as yet, extend to CST Thor's, other QL compatibles, or interfaces.

How to Contact Us

By Telephone:	0388-450610. Please disregard any old numbers you may have and the details on your old card. Office Hours : Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, SUB Helpline : Sunday to Thursday, 1pm to 8pm.
By Post:	SUB, PO BOX 3, SHILDON, Co. Durham, DL4 2LW.
By Fax:	0388-609845, marking fax clearly "FAO SUB".
By Telex:	934999 TXLINK G, quoting reference 219998590.
By Email:	Prestel, MBX 219998590 or via Prestel QLeaps, our own (QL run) bulletin board on 0388-773737 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It's a viewdata board that you access the same way as Prestel.
In person:	We welcome visitors, but due to our hectic schedule, the person you would like to see might not be able to see you if you just drop in. To avoid disappointment, please arrange a time to visit first. Just give Nicola a ring.

If there is anything you need to know, then please do not hesitate to contact us by one of the above methods. If you write, then please remember technical support is only available as described.

2

"EDIT", An Extended Editorial

As usual, I will start by announcing the obvious. Here is issue 3. I hope that you will find this issue just as easy to understand and as interesting as in general you tell us you found the previous issues. We are already working on some bits for issue 4. You may be more than pleasantly surprised at the new format we'll be adopting.

Shortage stops laser print

We were hoping that we would be able to print this issue almost entirely on our the new Epson GQ3500 that we are leasing, but due to a ridiculous problem we can't. It seems that there are no Epson GQ3500 collector units available ANYWHERE..! This means that it's out of action for quite a while.

The end result is that although the review of Text 87 was written and printed out from the Text 87 program it has been printed on our Sakata printer which is supported by the Text 87 printer driver. (Almost any other standard Epson compatible dot- matrix printer could have been used.) The text 87 preview in the last issue shows what we could have achieved...

"QL SUB" spreading support

This magazine is now read by over 500 users at the time of writing, most of whom are in the Uk, but a startling figure approaching 20 percent are from abroad. We understand the "QL World" has a readership that is made up mainly of foreign readers! Most are from Europe- I understand that subscriptions are only available in America and elsewhere through dealers as nobody else knows about the mag!

That is very interesting- we have been trying to get in contact with a number of QL user groups in foreign countries. For example, we now have a special agreement with "QL Contact France"- they send us a copy of their bi-monthly magazine "Informa" free, and we send them "QL SUB" free. Also, their members will have a collective membership to "QL SUB", although it will be restricted to some savings. QL Contact France will also be able to use editorial from "QL SUB", and vice versa, if we can translate it. (Any offers to do so would be appreciated.)

We have also been in contact with the new QL support service in Germany, to be called "Thornado Systems", and as they will be publishing a magazine to be called "The New Quality", we have made a similar agreement with them. Our efforts to work with other groups are hampered by getting no replies!

One groups that we have had a lot of contact with, but no magazines or any information from is "QLUB of Norway". If anyone from the club reads this, we would be please to receive either a magazine, and/or further details.

We have tried to contact the Belgium club who are organising International QL Day, in Belgium. Although we have had an invite, we have had no other correspondence. Please get in touch! The same goes for the QL groups in Belgium and Holland, the Australian Sinclair Users Group, "QLAVE" the Spanish group, and "Quasar" which I understand exists in Germany/Belgium.

Infact, if you are in a club, and the magazine has not said that it is now in contact with us, then please tell the club to contact us. We want all clubs to work together for success!

Lots to discover this issue

Back to the present "QL SUB" magazine and our present editorial content. We have an extremely useful program for all users of the Psion packages. It is not exactly the smoothest way of achieving wonders, but it does do the job without problems, and it can be compiled and multi-tasked with Quill, Abacus, Archive or other programs- it could be used with "The Spy" to make it give more attractive print-outs.

Programming Courses- Wait!

Our programming courses have been an area of much interest- however, at the present moment, magazines behind schedule, and everyone over-loaded, we can't really embark on new support without being sure we can do the idea justice. For the time being, the idea will have to wait, but we will offer them at our earliest opportunity. We have decided that to be fair, we will offer the courses as optional extras. This won't occupy magazine space...

Public Domain- Public Spirit

The programs section will be growing with more SUB written programs in the near future- next issue perhaps. We will also be putting these programs in the public domain library. This is finally beginning to get a little QL and QDOS software in it. The CP/M list is now growing quite well, but we cannot offer the full-time service for public domain that PDSL do- we do it as a subsidised SUB service only.

Your input to "QL SUB" would be most appreciated- we value comments and ideas from readers above all others.

More Developments from S.U.B.

Hello Again. It seems quite a while since I have been able to speak to subscribers through the pages of this magazine. At the time of writing, the last issue which was finished a-g-e-s ago, has still not been sent out due to very significant problems. You will have heard from me before about them, so I won't delve into them again.

More Support in Magazines

Lets look at the developments again. Support wise there are some fairly encouraging ones on the QL magazine side. Computer Shopper is covering the QL still, going into lots of detail about toolkits, expansions, the "Thor 16", and so on. It looks as though no QL companies are able to persuade themselves that Shopper's high advertising rates are worth paying, for an as yet unproved mag. This may change- a magazine that features the QL/Thor and "hits the shelves" really needs adverts from QL suppliers too.

Micro Computer Mart ran the article that we mentioned last issue, and by all accounts it was a success. We received a (large for us,) response from it, and according to the news editor, Ray Girvan, the chances of a regular QL column look good. Micro Mart generally has a good mix of articles on different machines, and although it is where departing QL owners seem most often to sell their machines, it is also, as a result, where most new QL users buy them.

There is a new magazine set to hit the shelves too. It is called Express or in full- "New Computer Express". It will be weekly, and will be of the "Popular Computing Weekly" genre. It will feature a variety of machines, including the QL, and will cover more news and events than just PCW games.

"QL World" Soon Subs Only?

"QL World" is looking rather unsteady on its feet, however. The rumour has it at the time of writing that it is likely to go subscription only, but Focus won't seem to confirm this...

Some of you have commented that we have still been advertising despite being behind with our magazines. This is true- there are two reasons. If we stop, everyone will throw their hands up in horror, claiming we are going to quit the QL market, or that we are no longer operating, and secondly because "QL World" makes "blunders" with our advertising that result in us getting another advert as compensation without which we would have fewer adverts.

Last issue we mentioned our bulletin board, QL Super User Board. It is a sad fact that we do seem dogged by difficulty. We now have the software, but our attempts to get a functioning Astracom modem, (which should have been reviewed in this issue), have met without success. The one we have will not connect to any other services!

Astracom is looking into the problems and will let us have another one when they can. We will hold back the modem review until they can supply us with an AC1000 modem that both we and they are satisfied is the best that they can offer. Until then, we advise you to consider carefully any decision to buy one- why not wait and see what happens to our latest struggle. (You could always phone us to enquire...)

Offices still not ready.....

Last issue we reported that we were hoping to move into new offices in a new business centre, but that they were as yet unfinished. Unfortunately they are still at the "shell of the walls" stage, so it looks as though it will be a while before we move.

At present we are in the board room of the local enterprise agency, so we have space, but not very much. The room is at least attractive with nice wooden pannelled walls that we are told are a significant fire risk!!!

The good news is that we now have two helpers, Colin Nicholson and Geoff Stevens. Colin will initially be on sales and the customer database, but we intend to train him up so that he can help me, Richard, with technical matters- an area that slows "QL SUB". Geoff will be dealing with trade and will be trying to ensure that in future, any orders that we place with suppliers don't take such a long time to arrive- so you get orders quicker.

Since Colin and Geoff started, the workload has increased to fill the available time and man power. We plan to get somebody else to help with any telephone order and enquiries, and he or she will also deal with reception, when we get one! This is pushing us towards the 7/8 people that we want to have, to provide ideal QL support.

Once again, your continued faith in our efforts to provide efficient and economical support are appreciated. Over the coming month Colin and Geoff will be learning all about the market and what is available- we hope that you will bear with them, and "QL SUB" as a whole as we continue to develop.

THE NEWS DESK

We have a in-tray full of interesting news here- some of it looks very good indeed, some of it not so good. (Some people will once again read bad omens into the not so good news- be warned -don't let all the "doom and gloom" merchants put you off the QL/Thor.)

We hope that we can cover most of the developments in this section without expecting you to have read all the back issues of any magazine that has ever said anything about the QL. We tried to give you a quick rundown on what has ever happened in the QL past in the introductory magazine, but if you are puzzled about anything, then please give us a ring- we'll explain in plain English without charge...

CST and "Thor 16" Emigrate

Starting off in the same order as in the last issue, we have some news on the subject of the "Thor 16". CST in Cambridge which was manufacturing the "Thor 16" is no longer there. One day it was there (the Friday,) and the next Monday it wasn't. No warning, no explanation. It caused many rumours, most of which we completely false, while others had some truth. I don't suppose that anyone will know exactly what really happened, so speculation is really not worth engaging in.

Well after a long fortnight, news started coming in that they had moved to Denmark, and are now working with the Danish company, Dansoft, and are using their new joint company "Thor International", to push the machine into the Soviet Union and elsewhere! So far, we have only had a brief fax from CST, but we have written to them to ask them what they have planned, and the schedule for new production. "Thornado" report little happening.

Thornado Systems Link-Up!

"Thornado" in Germany is now going to mention us in their adverts, and we have agreed to mention them in ours. The idea is that with "Thornado" doing almost exactly the same thing as us in Germany, and Europe, we can both benefit, as can our subscribers, from the extra news exchange, and the extra services that we can share. On this theme, any "QL SUB" members can now attend "Thornado Systems Club" meetings in Germany, and benefit from savings on their products, either through us or from "Thornado" direct.

Please enquire if you're interested. "Thornado" will be publicising their services to members in due course, so keep an eye out for their adverts...

We now have an ABC Elektronic "Mega RAM" in a prototype form- we believe that we are the only people in the world at the time of writing with one but I believe that ABC, despite trying to sell us, and "Thornado", and a few other companies, no doubt, the rights to the product, will be shipping some of the units in the near future. We hope that these are not quite as prototype as ours. Ours has wire links to patch the PCB, and it has a disturbing habit of only giving the QL 224k instead of 1024k!

Power Computing Pulls Plug

Sandy UK, now "Power Computing", has done the dirty to the QL market. Last issue we reported the change of name, but this issue we have to report bad news- the company, almost overnight, pulled out of the QL market. They even had outstanding adverts for QL products in "QL World", but we were advised one day, on ordering, that the company no longer supported the QL, as the market was almost dead, and that if we were wise, we would follow suite, and pull-out soon too! Needless to say, we dismissed that..

This means that a range of products are no longer available- the move was so sudden that we did not even have any idea when we produced our last QL catalogue and pricelist. The Thru-Con RAM card, SuperQboard series, Super-Disk interface, "QPower", CP/Mulator, and their new QLs are all extinct. Particularly annoying is that Power bought the sole rights to the QEP-III eprom programmer just before leaving the market. A very puzzling policy!

We have reviewed the "SuperQboard" in this issue as although it's no longer available new, it is still available second hand, and is excellent in use. We use nearly all SuperQboards here.

Spem Range Still Coming

Some of the products that "Sandy" had been marketing were actually built by "Spem" in Italy. "Spem" designs and builds hardware for the QL- the Spem Digitiser is particularly well known, but Spem also produces the "Futura" style keyboard, and their System/2 mounting kit for the QL. There is an internal RAM expansion board, the QEPROM eprom expansion board, and the "Mandelbrot Quickly" program, listed as Fast Mandelbrot in our catalogue.

We expect to be the only supplier of Spem QL products in the UK in future. The proprietor, (Guido Masoero), is a particularly helpful gentleman, but

unfortunately when we phone Italy, it seems quite difficult to get to talk to him, or anyone else who speaks English... This, and other problems has resulted in our "Spem" dealings being particularly slow & difficult. We do, however, expect to get things sorted out fairly soon— the products are excellent, so we will persevere.

Fewer Miracles, High Cost

Miracle Systems have also announced some bad news. They have rationalised their product range, in the wake of the Power Computing pull-out, and are now no longer supplying a number of their products. Other products in the range are now much more expensive, due, apparently, to high chip costs.

The "Expanderam" is no longer made. It is not seen as economical. Users with Expanderams need not worry about repairs, however, as it is basically just memory, and chips are available. For users with the "Expanderam", the "Trey Card" is also available, and this plugs in the end of the "Expanderam" to make a "Trump Card".

The "Trump Card" as was is now called the "Trump Card 768" and is priced at an amazing £299 compared with the old £175. This price increase was overnight— we were convinced it was a joke at first. The Trump Card is also available with just 512k and just 256k of RAM too. These versions are called the "Trump Card 512", and "Trump Card 256", priced at £225 and £149 respectively. We will be unable to offer much more of a saving on the new prices than we did on the old. The "Trump 256" was the "Ace Card".

Their serial to parallel converter and their "Midi" interface, are both the same price. The Midi-Interface is only sold with the Software, however. Miracle also sell a pair of dual 3.5" disk drives that are particularly attractive, being the quarter height units, each drive only 1" in height.

Atari ST/QL Now Available

Strong Computer Systems have arranged with the Scandinavian company "Futura DataSystems" to exclusively import an attractive upgrade option for Atari ST users, or maybe the reverse. The unit is described as a QL emulator for the Atari ST, preferably for use with at least an Atari 1040ST or Mega ST. It is a hardware and software combination that allows the ST to run QL software that is compatible with Qjump POINTER system including QRAM.

We tried the emulator at the last ZX Microfair, but true to form, our bad luck showed up and my first action, to turn off the pull-down menu on QTYP was fatal. The Atari QL crashed and had to be re-started from disk.

ST Software Developments

I understand that several problems still exist with the software, but that both Tony Tebby of Qjump, and Jochen Merz in Germany are examining and updating the code to make it more reliable and efficient. The main area that is causing problems apart from the accurate mapping of the keyboard is the printer and mouse control...

The board will only be available as a ready fitted part of Atari 1040STs at first, but variations and a DIY kit will become available in due course. The unit requires a small circuit board to be plugged inside the Atari in place of one of the chips which is then plugged into the board— this board carries the QL video chip and some serial hardware. The rest of the package is the software, a patch that modifies a copy of the JS QL ROM (you need a QL to save it from), and some instructions on the use of the QL/ST. Software running on the Atari QL is said to run at least twice as fast as on the QL, a worthwhile increase, and interestingly it is suggested that a speed increase of up to 4 times can be achieved. That is faster than the speed increase over the QL of a "Thor 16" which would be quite intriguing.

QL Software Developments

On the software side of things, the market is more lively even than last issue, with a wide range of new items becoming available in due course.

Several companies have important new products for the QL either available now, or in late stages of development and due for release shortly. We regret that by the time this magazine is published, some of these will have been released, and not reported, but if you are in any doubt about any QL product then please give us a ring.

Digital Expands QL Range

Digital Precision have several new products due for imminent release. A number of products have been released for quite a while, but have escaped reporting. I shall just run through these now to give you a summary. Most seem to be for programming purposes.

IDIS is claimed to be an intelligent disassembler because it automatically examines the many subroutines found in most machine code. This saves you having to write down jumps, and then disassemble them, too, later on. The latest version of this program is now called IDIS Special Edition of course so it carries a higher price tag.

For games players, and those who feel like trying to design their own games there is a product just right for them

6

that was first written for "Shadow Games" but in the light of their apparent disappearance from the QL scene a-g-e-s ago, Digital have attracted the title to their range.

New Software for POINTER?

The Qjump POINTER system examined in this issue's "Investigation" is also gaining more support now. The latest from Qjump is a selection of desktop utilities called QPAC. These comprise a calendar, a calculator, an alarm, a "system monitor", and a typewriter emulator. (Strange things here, eh?)

Jochen Merz software has announced a range of new products- "QD" is a fast editor that uses POINTER, and allows resizeable windows, mouse control..., and the pointer and writer's toolkit is now available as a tool for users who want to make their programs use large hires screen founts, and the POINTER environment, while those who want to print to the printer in the same manner can use "QWRITER 2". Some tools for programmers are also to be available shortly, as used by Merz.

Flight Simulator In Stock

An excellent new flight simulator is now available from a new Dutch firm, "Ekotek Systems". It features 3D view of the land and features such as some houses in a village, church, mills, factories, 5 airports (complete with planes and hangars), a radar dish... and lots more. More scenery will be available as an option later. Enquire for details- we are sole importers.

Sector's Read "QL World"

Sector now have a program that holds lots of details about "QL World" so you can find valuable information. We are not too impressed by our copy- it does not mention us, or other groups, and it is over 4 months out of date!

Sector do have some other programs in the pipeline, and have big plans for 1989. However, their existing product range is being supplemented for the time being with two utilities, one called "Overdrive", and another for use with the Spem Video Digitiser, an "Image Processor" that enhances the images created with that equipment.

Miracle "Tracker" Software

The Miracle "midi" interface has now got working QL software from an early user. The software now supplied is called "Tracker" and is Turbocharged. It appears to be very complicated, but not particularly effective, from our first impressions. Secondly, it, and/or the midi interface is prone to crashing- but we aren't sure which is to blame. More news on that next issue we hope, together with lots of news...

Development Kit

The market news section is almost overflowing. The gossip in the market is also plentiful, but that worthy of report is more scarce. We don't want to hear about people's own theories about what people are going to do, just fairly likely developments- from the supplier or people "in the know".

A Miracle- A QL Hard Disk

Miracle Systems have now elaborated on the QL add-on that they are going to use to claim a second win over the now diminishing competition. They have a "cheap" hard disk unit for the QL in preparation. It will have at least 20MB of storage, possibly 30MB, and will come as a strange all in one unit, twice the height of a QL, the same length, and the same width that will sit immediately behind the QL, plugging into the ROM cartridge port- apparently there will be a through connector on the back so that you can still plug in ROMs or their midi interface. Where will the QL sit...?

At this stage they are still working on the prototype, but they seem very convinced that it will actually come out. When they have finished building the working prototype, they will get Tony Tebby of Qjump to write the hard disk interface software, which will be compatible with CST SCSI unit.

Digital MS/DOS Emulator Soon

Digital Precision seem to be bringing out an IBM PC emulator, although at the time of writing they deny it. The product will probably be fairly slow but would be an attractive option for the QL user considering going IBM. An IBM emulator on the Atari ST is said to only achieve 75% of the speed of an IBM PC, so it will be interesting to see just what appears. Any product of this type would certainly make DP the biggest QL software supplier.

MS/DOS and Hard Disk Duo?

The combination of a DP IBM emulator, and the Miracle hard disk drive would be a particularly interesting duo, and could persuade possible deserters from the QL to stay with the machine- after all, the competition is not as successful as expected at present...

All this- Just Gossip So Far

Gossip is gossip. Support is becoming polarised into a few QL firms, but things are looking promising for the future for which we are planning. We have lots more gossip being checked, and we will tell you all next time.

Write to Reply?!

Dear SUB,

Further to your plea from the heart, wanting subscribers to write to you about equipment and comments. I was fascinated to read in the latest issue of SUB that Thor XVIs are only just becoming available. I have owned a 1 Mbyte version since May 1988. I find the machine a joy to use in comparison to the QL and I am particularly happy with the keyboard and Xchange (with minor reservations about Archive).

I wholeheartedly support you complaints about support from CST. On receiving my Thor XVI, I discovered that the serial cable I had been using between my QL and Brother HR-15XL printer was incompatible with the computer. Having time on my hands, I drove to CST's former UK address where some on the spot surgery was carried out on the serial cable by CST stafff. However, all was not well since I soon discovered that I could not, for example, print a full page of A4 paper or a complete spreadsheet- I have to send a number of lines at a time. I have since written to CST on numerous occasions and even phoned them in Denmark, only to be told that Dansoft were supposed to be dealing it. CST have not even had the courtesy to reply to my last letters!

I no longer subscribe to QL World as I find it a waste of time and money. I only really use the Xchange package and the only progr-amming I undertake is for Archive; I therefore find little value in the QL World Articles. Ideally I would like further advice on Archive programming, particularly on how to tidy up some of my programs which have grown over the years like Topsy. I have mentioned the only peripheral I own. I am looking at some time in the future towards buying either a 24 pin dot matrix or a laser printer, depending on price. I use my machine for writing letters, domestic finance on abacus (both for bank accounts and annual budget forecasting) and Archive.

You asked what service I would most like to see; I would like to be able to send someone my Archive programs and seek advice on how to best tidy them up and improve upon them. Mine have grown out of all proportion buy I do not have the time to sort them out.

Major David E Parrott, Middlesex.

Ed, Thank you for your thoughts on Thor life. Your letter was in fact the first we received for specific publication in "QL SUB". We reported the late arrival of Thor 16's as this is what CST told us, although we did suffer an inordinate delay in publication of issue 2. We have taken up the matter of your lead with Dansoft. We have considered the Archive programming help, but individual consultancy would prove expensive.

Dear SUB,

Congratulations on the eventual release of issue 2. I had begun to worry that it would never happen! I think that it is imperative that the magazine reaches its' deadlines because in the world of Sinclair, too many things are late in arriving and it is those organizations that have broken this pattern that have survived.

Definitely go with Text 87 and a laser printer, the improvements in quality far outweighs the advantages of fancy print. Check out fountext for large style print; I don't know if you can laser them though. On the subject of Text87, am now using this for all my WP work. It is worth letter the membership know that once you have mastered the RULER, you are there and will definitely want to throw Quill away. With the latest version you do not need Toolkit II to avoid many key presses for different founts. I hope it takes off.

Why not a members panel to evaluate new software? If review copies were sent to 6 or 8 members who had to grade different aspects on a scale plus provide a say, 50 word summary of their impression, SUB could then average the scores and write a consolidated review from the panels comments. This would have two advantages. First it might cut down on the time you need to spend reviewing software- more time to get the magazine out!! Second, I get the impression that constant users like yourself who do reviews can often without realising it, make allowances for short comings in a programs friendliness. With great

8

respect, your competence as a very frequent user might not give the program the sort of test an <u>average</u> user would. It would encourage software houses to make the programs as slick as possible.

All the best, I look forward to issue 3.

Greg Warner-Harris, Southampton.

Ed, Thanks for the comments. As we always explain, we do everything we can to publish on time- at last we think we have achieved it. The idea of the members panel is great apart from that we have to BUY nearly all of our review copies- we cannot afford more than one to use ourselves, and software houses almost never supply us with a review copy to use.

Dear SUB,

Thought I might help you fill up your letter page. I am a bit miffed at having to wait so long for this (issue 2) issue of the mag!! I seems as though there is a bit of a lethargy in your readership when it comes to putting finger to keyboard, I wonder why this is?

Could it be because with a few exceptions, the vast majority of the owners of QL's make their machines work for a living, usually in a professional capacity. Now I am one of those people and the one thing that is guaranteed to put me and probably 90% of other users off, is uncertainty about when and if the next issue is coming. To your credit is that the subscription is for 12 issues (so you at least planned for delays etc) not 12 months. (Ed, Delays in issue 0 convinced us.)

I recently heard SUB described as well meaning amatures. It was during a discussion regarding should I cancell QL World now that is is subscription only in favour of SUB. I have to be honest and tell you that I was advised to do the reverse.

In early November 1988 I had a discussion with Ed regarding a prog my son had written. He has a problem with "find and exchange" within a file. I was promised a short listing to overcome the problem, it has yet to materialise. (Ed, We have since written about this to him.) Last year I wrote asking for advice about a sideways printer prog which would not work on my Shinwa printer. After a more than reasonable time I telephoned asking about it. On 7 October I wrote a backup letter with details as had been requested. (Ed, we aim for replies in 2 weeks.)

I early January THIS YEAR I received a communication stating that my letter had been filed as processed, apologising for the delay, and asking for a photocopy of my printer manual. The trouble was that I got fed up with waiting for this letter and in the meantime purchased a wide carriage printer to allow me to continue with my work. I would still like the answer out of curiosity as I still have my Shinwa.

During the conversation regarding the prog I requested a list of the public domain software available, was promised such a list shortly. I am still waiting for the same. (Ed, Another one shoud be enclosed!)

On the plus side I did receive the power pack within 2 days or ordering and at a fair price.

I seems to me that if you hope to survive you are going to have to get more professional, otherwise people will not request a second years subscription, and as the quality of the magazine articles are excellent and well presented (I don't even mind the print) that would be a case of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. There is a market for a rival to QL World, particularly a down to earth, non-weekend style, glitzy, advertising man's dream. I have heard a rumour that another entrant into this field is being seriously considered.

Don't leave us to the mercy of the major publishers. If you think my comments are unfair then that is your choice. I have taken into account the fact that organising such a magazine is at the least difficult. The forgoing letter is not a criticism, but perhaps an early warning as there must be other SUB members who feel the same.

I give you permission to print this only in its entirety.
Dennis O'Connor, Nr. Swindon.

Ed, Thanks for your honesty. Please, everyone, tell us problems- that is the only way we can sort them out. I believe such problems have been ironed out, and won't recur. I look forward to a follow-up some time.

Software⁸⁷ Text⁸⁷?

Is this word processor really worth the fuss? We set out to find out!

Software87 supply only Text87, and the support programs, Fountext, and Founted. As without a track record, the company is rather an unknown quantity, I hope you will not mind if I provide you with a little bit of background information to help.

Software87 is rather an enigma. It arrived on the QL scene first at a ZX Microfair where the product did not attract much attention. It was launched modestly, and Software87 were unable to ship for some time because they had some last minute problems to iron out. Unfortunately with such a long booking time needed for advertising, this often happens.

I think from discussions with some of those early Text87 users that everyone was pleased with it, when they got it, even though initial reactions lead to the author, Fred Toussi, getting a large influx of telephone calls for help! It also took some explanation before users understood that their new copy of Text87 deliberately had some menu options that do nothing. (As yet!)

Text⁸⁷ v. Quill v. Editor?

There isn't really any competition to Text87 in the QL word processor market, as "The Editor" by Digital is more of a "programmable" text editor– a very capable program, but on that requires more knowledge and experience by users. (As a classic, we will examine "The Editor" in a coming issue.) Word processor wise, the only real competition is Quill– and that, even though I use it every day, with TurboQuill+, cannot offer many of the features Text87 does.

These features, in brief, are the ability to handle the more advanced features of your printer, give you true "WYSIWIG" on screen, even if you use a whole range of typefaces, or use a dot matrix capable of the double or triple height characters available, and proportional spacing, where each character is positioned according to the width of previous characters as opposed to the Quill

fixed spacing– where you get eighty characters, or whatever, to a line. It drives dot matrix and daisywheel printers with equal efficiency, and supports all their special features.

The program also supports powerful page layout features, allowing you to have up to 4 columns, and multi-line headers and footers. This is not possible from Quill, although "The Editor" handles this with a supplied command file that reformats your text, and cuts and pastes it into columns– effective, but messy in comparison, and not easy to use.

Software 87 also claim the Text87 screen display to be very fast in operation, greatly exceeding Quill on most screen operations. The text operations such as block move, copy, and search and replace are also a great deal faster and more powerful.

Finally, Text87 is able to "import" text written on Quill or The Editor and can export ascii files. The file handling facilities within Text87 are limited as it is intended as a multi-tasking word-processor for QLs with at least 64k expansion RAM. I am using it on a 640k QL with the Pointer environment installed. You can simply press CTRL C to get back to SuperBASIC– using Pointer of course, the screen display is main-tained without need for a "refresh". Using Taskmaster or other programs, Text87 conforms to req'd standards, and uses F4 to achieve its refresh.

Menu driven in tiny text...

Text87 is menu driven, and after you adapt to the somewhat unorthodox series of menus that appear on the bottom line of the screen, (in tiny writing,) you find them unobtrusive, and reasonably helpful. The fount on the screen can be set as required, but the text in the menus is always the smallest typeface– smaller than Quill's 80 column text, CSIZE 0,0. If you can read the text on the menu in the screendump, then you can compare that with the text in the text area which is Quills 80 column.

Help! (Not from the manual)

There is no on-line help available, unlike Quill... Although the manual has been re-written, it is still the type of work that leads you to think that you must be the only person who cannot understand it as it dashes on through the system as though you are only reading the manual for ideas, as you are already a fluent user. A conversation with the author is very similar, as he talks about it with all the love and familiarity of any programmer about a successful work. Everything becomes clear, at least until you attempt to recall it all.

The manual makes no claims to teach you about Text87. It starts "This Manual is a learning aid for the use of the text87 wordprocessing system. Its content is not meant as a specification for Text87. You should discover the working of text87 on your particular hardware by trial and use text87 for any particular task at your own discretion." What it should say is that the best way to learn about ANYTHING is by having a quick look at the manual, and then extensively "messing about" with it!

AZERTY and WYSIWYG support

I find the use of the keyboard odd- CTRL left, for example, deletes as normal except that you cannot delete to a previous line, from the start of a line. On pressing a cursor key, the on screen text is reshuffled. I also find key-strokes, in particular cursor keys, sometimes fail, but I can't be certain Text87 is at fault.

You can reconfigure the keyboard for foreign characters or french AZERTY layout, which is ideal for our all our foreign readers, as with the very powerful printer drivers, you will finally have a system where you can really get WYSIWIG, even if you use text with foreign characters.

Peculiar command keystrokes

You can't, unfortunately, choose the keystrokes to select commands. The function keys are I think, neglected as F1 and F2 don't do anything (as yet.) The only really important one is F3 that selects extended command mode. Most users will be experienced

with QL Quill, and retaining some of the old keystrokes would not have been altogether bad. F4, wasted on redrawing the screen, seems a waste when you have to press "F3 T S" to select a new typeface- F5 for the lightning symbol that indicates page breaks also seems a peculiar choice.

The command sequences are said to be organised in a structure that allows the most commonly used ones to be achieved most quickly. To my mind, some of the most useful ones are now on the second level. For example, F3 F S is used for save and F3 F L for load. It is twisted logic, as F3 L is allocated to layout- how often do you change the size of the footer, header, or text area, and the number of columns you use? Word-processors store their data in RAM, so I think most users save the text regularly. I saved my text confident of needing to, less. I experienced no crashes, and did not find any important bugs.

The answer to this and several other long-winded key strokes, like fount changing, is QJump Toolkit 2, Hotkey system 2, or a key-defining program. Using the Toolkit 2 feature as an example, with this available, you can simply load up Text87 with some ALT keys programmed with command key sequences, and then a simple ALT B for bold, or ALT U for underline is achieved. The manual even gives help on how to do it. This method does the job, but I think that a high priority for a future edition should be some sort of built-in macro set.

Unique screen handling in C

"Text87" was written in C, and uses unique screen handling routines that do not rely on QDOS, and so is not held back by the QL's slow character routines. The screen handling is one of the rather special features that is a selling point of course, but I still have a number of reservations.

Although the advertisements and the review in "QL World" some time ago stated that it was extremely fast, I would say that even if it is fast on paper, this does not feel to be the case in practice. Figures on paper can be used to form an impression, but an impression from experience is often better in forming an opinion. Having said that, it is fast enough.

I can easily type ahead of the text, and scrolling up or down this text line by line is very slow especially as the flashing cursor disappears, and nothing appears to be happening. It is slower moving from the bottom of the screen to the top than it is to scroll the same number of lines through the text..! As a Quill user, I panicked on a number of occasions when the cursor disappeared whilst scrolling up. QL Quill can crash at random, while scrolling up the page!

I understand that a new version will have even faster routines, and will be able to overcome some of the odd features of the present version. The screen will show justification for example. At present, only the ruler tells you justification is on, and it is sometimes confusing to work out what is what when you have both types of text mixed on your page.

Setting-up the founts you want to use on screen to represent the text to be displayed on the printer is worth while, but long-winded. With the Founted program, you can design new founts to be used, and with the Fountext program, you can print all of them, including fancy ones, on a suitable Epson type matrix printer.

The ruler is fundamental

The ruler is one of the fundamental features of Text87 that you must get the hang-of... that, and the layout. The ruler is a departure from Quill too. It has an initially bewildering set of options, but basically, all the required text options can be set up with the minimum of fuss, once you have learnt what the signs mean. The ruler does not impose, or assume maximum width etc., suggested by the layout, so you need to be careful. It is another Text87 feature that once mastered, gives flexibility.

Visualise the page layout

The layout is a representation of the page, on which you determine the size/position of the text, header, and footer areas. I can't somehow visualise pages just in terms of the areas of text- I also like to know the dimensions in units that mean something in characters to a line, or lines to an inch. The thought is that such ideas are now outdated.

Generally knowing how many pages you have so far written is the other annoying missing feature at present. At the bottom of the screen, you get a word count, line, and frame count. This latter should tell you which page/frame you are on, but it does not, which means that you either divide the line number by the number of lines to a page, or you print the document out and hope! There is no indication of column, frame/page breaks either, unless you create a forced page break by pressing F5.

Printer drivers... Oh dear...

The area of the printer driver is one best left for reference. It is not easily user configurable, as it consists of a long assembly language source file, with copious comments. Just install a suitable printer, or the "any printer" version, and type! Software87 have many printer drivers available, and can do special ones.

Conclusion, Worth exploring!

I have enjoyed writing this review- it forced me to delve into Text87, despite the manual and initial poor impressions, and I am now an ardent fan despite the number of criticisms that I have had to make. Text87 does much more, but my space is limited.

The important thing to do is to set-up all the options, the defaults, the page layout, the printer used, the screen founts, and all the other bits and pieces, and save them in a file- preferably the file called configure_c87 that is used on boot. If you have more than one set, you can store these under another name. When that is done, a lot of anxiety disappears as you know you can type without fear of forgetting settings. Unfortunately, I think many people will be putting up with poor founts, and unsuitable defaults just because they dare not delve into the depths of the menu system or the manual...

Professional word processor

If you are in need of a professional word-processor for your QL, then you could do much worse than to invest in Text87. You may have some second thoughts when you first sit down with it, but if you are willing to have a go you'll be pleased you did.

"SPELL

"SPELLBOUND" from Sector Software

Spellbound from Sector Software is by the same author as FlashBack, and the "TaskMaster" systems. It is not a new release but it is a classic product.

"Spellbound" is a real-time spelling checker for the Sinclair QL with at least 256k memory expansion. It was specifically designed to work with Quill, or recent editions of Editor. By real-time, I mean that the program is able to check what you type as you type, and indicate to you that you've made a mistake as soon as you do so.

The program is supplied with a 30000 word dictionary as standard, but you can add as many of your your own words to the dictionary as you need, the only practical limit being the memory or microdrive/disk capacity- said to be 50000 words on microdrive.

Getting Started

Setting the program up is quite easy. It will run from microdrive or disk, and an easy to follow back-up program is supplied that automatically makes a disk configured to load the Spellbound boot before your usual one, which is renamed to spellboot2. One annoying thing about it is the boot gives you a loading "display" in use. (You can edit it, but it's tedious.)

Next, you must type in a dictionary filename- This is ok, but means you must wait while it loads so you can select your dictionary at the right time. You can, however, load other dictionaries or skip loading and load one later, or change dictionaries.

Loading later has its perils as the manual stresses- you need sufficient free RAM at the time. If used without Taskmaster or something similar, then Quill will grab all available memory. The Editor is rather better behaved, as you can choose how much memory to make available to Editor at any time. With Taskmaster, you can also check spelling in other programs loaded- a BASIC program, or a maybe Flashback.

In use, CTRL "o"

In use, after pressing CTRL o to turn it on, Spellbound links into Quill or the Editor smoothly. It displays a discreet note of its status in the status area of Quill. There are five modes for different types of typist.

1 Shows the error in the report box.
2 Just beeps if you make a mistake.
3 Beeps if you make a mistake, and it flags the mistake with a ^ character.
4 Same as mode 3, but ignores all key presses for 1.35 seconds- enough time for you to notice the mistake made.
5 Same as mode 4, but ignores all key presses until you ask for "examples", or you press the ESC key to cancel.

The other important options are to be able to save, or load dictionaries, and add/delete words from one used. You can add 300 words per session, so could even do a new foreign version.

By far the most innovative feature is the example commands- CTRL e gives a series of example words starting with the letter that you first typed. CTRL E gives you a list that you can step through word by word until you find the one you want. Pressing ENTER on that word then "types it into" your text at the current cursor position.

Not "Filebound"

The program does not at present have the facility to check any documents that you have already typed, and then stored on microdrive or disk. I don't think that this is a problem as you will not usually be checking what you have already typed, but rather what you will be typing in future. If you are a magazine editor, however, and you want to check work from people who type articles for you, then there was a program printed in "QL World" in the November 87 issue and a Turbo compiled version by Charles Dillon is available from PDQL at modest cost.

Major Problems

I suffer problems due to "Spellbound" going off with disconcerting ease, but apparently this is uncommon and we have had few complaints of this. (If you do anything other than delete left or press ENTER it goes off and I usually forget to turn it on again.) It seems that my type and edit style is not typical of most users. As this is the only major complaint that I have of the program, it scores well.

There is only one competitor for the product at present, and fortunately, Spellbound and QTYP complement each other- QJump "QTYP" is intended for use with the POINTER environment with which Spellbound is not compatible. Feature for feature, the two programs are very similar, but of course each adopts the "family" user interface.

"Spellbound" is an excellent product, and offers users an easy to use (and understand) system that enhances the operation of Quill or "The Editor" so much that the QL can be recommended for serious word-processing users.

BOUND"

"Spellbound" by Peter J. Jefferies.

13

Computer One

Pascal

Computer One Pascal is a thorough bred version of the classic language that programmers usually either love or hate. If you are not familiar with "Pascal" but you can program using SuperBASIC, then you may have mixed feelings about Pascal- you may be drawn to the (nice) improvements in speed, and portability of source code. It is not the only version, but is certainly the best value.

Pascal is a widely used programming language, and is commonly used in learning, and higher education, and is taught for its structure, the (potential) clarity, and portability of source code. Compilers are available for almost every machine, although you need a machine like the QL to get the most from using it. Spectrums will run Pascal, for example, but do not support several features- in particular file-handling.

This package is supplied on microdrive together with a manual of over 100 pages. The manual is typeset and attractive, and the contents just as good. There is an index and considerable reference material that proves very useful when you write a program and want to check what is standard and what is not.

The manual is not meant to be a tutorial, but for someone who has a reasonable knowledge of programming already, the clear explanations of syntax, procedures, functions, and the number of examples, and example programs scattered through it make it quite a good tutorial- but then I like reference works. If you can't program yet, but you are thinking about learning then I suggest that you will find SuperBASIC easier, but, as Pascal is stricter about structuring, you may benefit from learning that first, then applying your knowledge to BASIC. We are hoping to review some books for the enthusiast soon.

There are a large number of useful extensions to standard Pascal, and these include almost all of the useful commands for controlling graphics, sound, and the features of the QL. If you program in SuperBASIC now, then you will probably find that with the exception of string handling (a sore point in Pascal unfortunately), you will probably soon "catch-on" and will only need to refer to the manual to check parameters to pass to procedures or functions- which are like BASIC's.

Computer One Pascal is close to the ISO Pascal standard, but there are a number of differences, some of which are really improvements to enable the compiler to access the features of the QL, and QDOS. However, for the technical among you:-
1) Procedures and functions may not be passed as parameters.
2) I/O has been expanded and modified (slightly), in order to give the user the full benefits of the QL I/O.
3) No checking of assignment to the control variable of a for loop is made, either direct or indirect. (Etc..)
4) Gotos may not jump out of procedures or functions.
5) None of the statements above is a particular problem!

Code produced is intermediate code that is then interpreted- speed is quoted at typically 15 times faster than SuperBASIC.

14

Once you have made a back-up copy of the microdrive onto disk or microdrive, (there being no key cartridge copy protection) and you have configured it for the appropriate device, then you can load it. Computer One Pascal is a full development system that loads in a resident extension, which when the new keyword, "PASCAL", is used, loads in the full menu'd system.

The main system menu provides you with a number of options which are selected by keystroke or a scrolling bar. This menu can do peculiar things when used with multi-tasking. However, development of programs in the (Computer One) system is so attractive I don't really care..! You type your source code, save it, exit back to the main menu, then compile it. This is fast and efficient, and reports what errors have been found in your program source code during the compilation process.

If its ok, then you can either execute your program in the interpreted mode, within the development system, or, if you prefer, and I would advise from experience, you make use of the "create job" option that creates a standard job for QDOS. The first is ok as long as you have definitely not created an endless loop- there is no "sure fire" way of exiting from a program. The second, means you can run your program, EXEC it from SuperBASIC, and if you've made a blunder, just kill-off the job using appropriate extra keywords if you have them.

The other nice thing about the "create job" system is that no run-time resident extensions are necessary, and the resulting code is well-behaved, and will run without incompatibilities with QRAM, "TaskMaster", or indeed on a standard QL system.

If it's incorrect in some way, you can go back in the editor- the big bonus is when you type the file name, it loads in a version with all the mistakes highlighted, together with use-ful explanatory text. This makes finding the bugs simple! You simply use the "find error" option to place the cursor at the start of the next bad code- very useful. The only problem is that sometimes you correct the error text, not the actual source code, leaving the same mistake in the source. When you have made corrections, you can delete all references to the mistakes with a single command, save, and compile it again.

The editor supplied is customised for creating Pascal source code. When you press ENTER, it keeps the indent that you used on the previous line. Most editing keystrokes are supported, and commands are carried out through a drop-down menu system.

There are a couple of irritations with the compiler- A QDOS standard is that end of line (eol) is code 10 but this Pascal uses the standard eol code, 13. This makes transferring files between your programs and other programs using ascii (export) files rather difficult- but not an insurmountable problem. The other is that if your program goes wrong, then in true (Pascal) fashion, there is nothing you can do- your user will get a Pascal run-time message. Of course, well written Pascal programs need never crash at run-time! We have a couple of demo programs in the PD library that demonstrate the speed.

I would recommend this package to beginners, and experienced programmers alike- it is good value, an ideal learning tool. I use the compiler quite regularly, and although not as fast as some other languages, it produces respectable code. The other options for QL Pascal are the Prospero Pascal, and the now (unavailable) Metacomco package, both around £100 each.

ICE, "Icon Controlled Environment", is one of the rare programs that was written a number of years ago, but is still going reasonably strong now. It was the first commercial "front end"- and is still the only standard front end program for the CST Thor series. It's supplied on a 16k ROM cartridge.

The QLs initial screen displays the ICE copyright message. (Incidentally, on a JS QL, the message is displayed twice- this is not a fault.) Pressing F1 or F2 drops you straight into ICE. You can avoid this on later ICE ROMs by pressing ALT during start-up. This then allows you to load a program off microdrive or disk called boot, just as you normally would. You can resume using ICE at any time by typing "ICE"!

ICE- "Icon Controlled Environment" is quite naturally icon based. That is, the program uses miniature picture to represent both actions and objects. The green background has a selection of icons on it- calculator, calendar, microdrive, floppy, RAM disk, "bin", and "QUIT". The file display area is white, displaying icons representing different types of file on the medium selected, with drive details, name, and the present time along the top.

The system is what is known as a WIMP system- window, icon, menu, pointer, controlled. The mouse is optional, as ICE can be operated by cursor keys and the SPACE bar. On a mouse, select and do are achieved by buttons, but with the keyboard you click the space bar once for select, twice for a do.

# EIDERSOFT ICE!
ICON CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENT

Extra features are selected from the menu bar at the bottom of the screen by highlighting the function. Some of the options present a pull-down menu, while others have a pop-up "confirm?" or a report box. The pointer speed is configurable, but seems painful at times- in particular when you have to move half way across the screen to select the right response on a pop-up prompt box. At other times, a speedy pointer makes you "wizz" up and down past the required menu option. Silly!

To copy file(s) you simply select the file icon(s), select the destination device and the files are copied. To execute a job, or LRUN a program you do the appropriate icon. You cannot start a file off as a job normally, but be careful- you can crash the QL. To delete a file, you select it, and then select the bin. When confirmed, the file is deleted. Other actions- system/file details, back-ups, system set-up, (including date set), pointer speed, and a range of other tasks are carried out in a similar easy manner.

The range includes ICE ROM cartridge, the ICE mouse, the comprehensive art package for full screen drawings, ICE Art (and ICE Mouse Art for use only with the mouse), the ICE programmers toolkit, (so you can write your own programs use the ICE ROM routines), Drawing Off-Ice, (a 2D cad package), Publishing Off-Ice, (the ICE desktop publisher which includes the "Drawing Off-Ice" and ICE Mouse Art programs), ICEicle, (which offers you defineable pull-down menus in the Psion suite, and various other packages), the ICE multi-tasking manager program ChoICE that allows you to switch between up to four programs and the ICE desktop, and a couple of programs from other software houses that are compatible.

Looking at "ChoICE" in particular, it becomes clear that the ICE system can not presently be recommended to users with sophisticated requirements, an observation- not a major criticism.

The ChoICE system lets you access up to four programs at any one time, and suspends any programs that are not selected. Setting up program "suites" is easy, but requires the ChoICE user to work-out how to run programs that demand QDOS extensions or special boot programs to operate. The program offers simple task selection, but not full multi-tasking which is better.
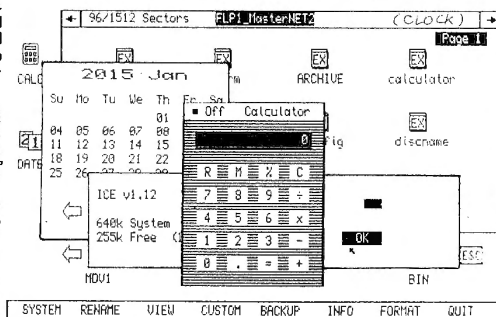
Of our readership, the vast majority will either use ICE now, or will have used it at some time in the past on a regular basis, perhaps having later upgraded to another (inherently multi tasking) system such as Taskmaster, QRAM, or Swopper. That is successful.

Most experienced users would soon get frustrated at the shortcomings of ICE -not that ICE doesn't do the majority of things to files you will need to- but if you consider youself still to be inexperienced, and you are having difficulty with essential jobs like maintaining back-ups, and "order" in your microdrive or disk filing system, then you will greatly appreciate the simplicity of using the ICE system. ∎

SPOOKED

Back in the early days of computing, there was a rival line of entertainment using computer technology. Video games. In those days, it seemed that video games got far greater coverage- "Pacman" was one of the most popular games, and is still successful today.

Eidersoft "Spook" is a Pacman clone. Pacman is a game where you play the part of a little yellow character who is nearly all mouth. He lives in maze worlds filled with pep pills that he needs to eat to survive. Sometimes, an extra bonus appears, in the form of a fruit that he can eat for a bonus.

All this sounds easy. Unfortunately, the mazes are occupied by a number of "not so friendly" ghosts who are keen to prevent you achieving success. If one catches you, you lose one life. You start with three, but gain more as you progress from level to level.
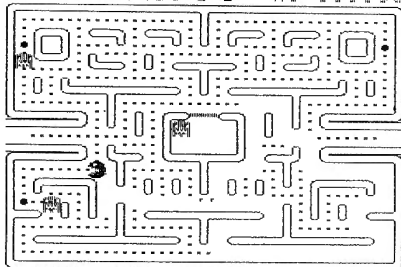
The only way to deal with ghosts is to eat up one of the four especially large "power pills" spread around the maze. After eating one such pill, the ghosts become powerless and dash back to the ghost home in the maze centre.

The game is fast, possibly too fast. The game seems to have lots of mazes and stages to play- far more than I have seen. The game remains the same throughout, but gets faster, and more difficult as the ghost get cleverer. The only aim is to earn more points.

There is only one thing to spoil your fun. That is the odd copy protection used. You have to find and type in a code from a chart in only 30 seconds. At least it runs off disk drives ok.

The game concept is simple, the play fast and addictive, and the graphics attractive. As a classic arcade game, "Spook" is a good buy, and will keep games players entertained for hours. I couldn't ever "get the hang of it", but it still comes well recommended.

STRIP POKER!
By Talent Computer Systems

Perhaps a game of poker would be more entertaining- **"STRIP POKER"**? This one pits you against "Denise", who plays a very good game indeed. Of course, she says, as a matter of honour, if you lose, you must remove your clothes too. As the instructions point out, warn your friends and relatives, as they may not understand if they find you undressed, in the early hours of the morning, playing with your micro.
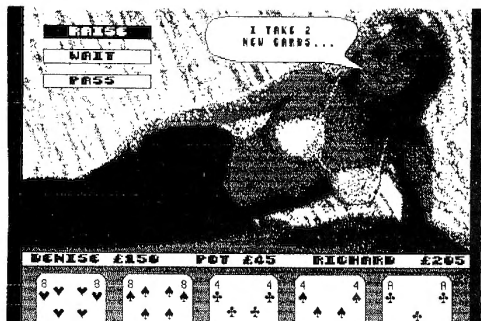
All the rules of poker as played in this version are explained in the instructions with the game. As I am not a card player, I was at a rather a disadvantage, but nevertheless, I won enough to make her take her T-Shirt off a couple of times. The trouble is that I can't win consistently, and if you lose she chooses to put something back on again, and if she loses, she lets you put something back on again!

The game displays a large picture of her, either in shaded red, white, and black for colour monitors, or in all four colours for mono monitors where they produce smooth shades of grey. I think that it would be fair to say that the graphics are good within the limitations of the QL colour display.

At the bottom (of the page) your cards are displayed, and you move an "arrow" over the cards to discard cards and take other actions. Meanwhile, a voice bubble, as used in cartoons, displays her opinions on your play, and a fast running commentary on what to do next.

The game uses the cursors and SPACE so it will also work with a joystick. You find yourself getting into a rhythm, and press the wrong keys just at that crucial point. Certainly, this game is a challenge, and may certainly help to break the ice at the office parties!

I don't think any parents need worry- kids won't be good enough players to get her to reveal all, if anything!

17

GENERAL LEDGER

"S.D. Microsystems" is a small family firm that has developed a range of QL business applications that, although marketed modestly, have gradually been gaining acclaim among business users, and from the popular comments made by the users we have spoken to, quiet justifiably so. Our "accounts" department has recently sat down and had a look at the packages, and so we will be using them too, from now on. (Up to now, we've decided to let some one else sweat blood to do them all!)

Manual and Objectives

The manual, (photocopied onto orangy red paper to prevent illegal copying) states that General Ledger has two main functions in a small business:-

1 To record all financial transactions in an orderly fashion.
2 To provide a wide range of useful reports.

It states "GENERAL LEDGER is designed to do your basic bookkeeping for you" and that is correct. Provided that you have a fairly small and modest business, then you will find it useful and inexpensive, and you will not have to record the first transaction as a large debit due to buying it...

The program is written in SuperBASIC-this is an advantage if you ever want to delve into the program to modify it in any way. At present, it loads with the Liberation QLOAD utility so the usual problem (a long wait) of loading programs in BASIC is avoided. The program is set-up to load off the medium supplied of course, but should you wish to configure it to work off another device, this can be done with ease- or you use device emulation.

The program could have been compiled with the QLiberator compiler but that idea was scrapped because at present, if you make a fundamental mistake, you can simply type GOTO 100 after the SuperBASIC error, and all you valuable data is intact. If it had been compiled, if you make a mistake that causes the program to crash, the program, and the data, would be lost.

The Main Menu Options

After loading, the package presents you with a main menu. This is split into categories, with each having sub-menus as appropriate. The only odd feature is that the menus on this package use numbers, where "The Small Traders Pack" uses mostly letters for menus, only sometimes, numbers. (It is irrelevent unless you use both...)

By S.D. MicroSystems.

The manual suggests that the first thing you do on first loading General Ledger is load up the demo file that is supplied, called Sample. This has some imaginary trading figures on it, and gives you the opportunity to use the options available without having to type in lots of data first, and to familiarise yourself with features. This is a good idea that more people who write software should consider.

Having experimented with the sample, you will want to get down to "work". The first thing to do is to reset the accounts file so you can start with your own figures from scratch. This option then asks you for opening bank and cash balances. How to do this in the right way is fully explained too.

Setting Everything Up

The next thing to do is to set-up the account codes to suit your business, (you may not like the supplied ones-you can save your set for later use,) add your trading name, and set-up the printer if you need to. The options for the printer are somewhat limited, so you may need to use PAR_USE ser if you have a parallel printer. The type of serial port is also limited- you can choose ser1 or 2, and the baud rate, but not the other parameters-but SD to their credit do help here.

Getting down to business

With these things done, and having had a think about how often you are going to do your "books", you can get on, and put some figures in. Option 2 takes you into a monitor type display with the left window showing a list of the accounts and codes, and the right hand one showing a choice of transaction types to select from.

Data entry is where the first moan is involved. If you select an option by mistake, you have no way of quitting it, and you have to go through the whole process of entering data, and you then don't when asked to confirm. Adding data usually involves putting the date in, in the form ddmmyy, the account number from the list shown, the amount, (no more than £9999.99!) the reference, (the cheque no. or the invoice/receipt no. of up to 6 char,) a description of up to 15 letters, and finally the VAT code. This can be "0" (zero rated), "1" (standard), or "2" (for exempt- for exports etc.). You can't edit mistakes, but you can say NO to "Confirm?" and add again.

If you press ENTER when asked for the date when adding the next entry, it defaults to the date of the previous entry, which is handy for putting a batch of figures in. There is no date

default apart from this. You do not need to set the date held by the QL- it is not important, unless you use a disk system or Toolkit 2 that keeps a record of the date files are saved.

Salvation! Date-sorting!

Having added all your figures for the session, you can choose to let the QL put them all into date order. This is invaluable- it saves you an age! (You don't have to pre-sort all records.)

You can also re-allocate funds from one account to another- for example, from your bank balance to your petty cash account, or vice versa, or from your stock to your capital account. I don't think this could be used to do anything misleading, so it conforms to the accounting principle of show- ing mistakes as well as the facts.

Reports- Main Objective

Putting all your figures in is of no practical benefit, apart from making you feel very proud with yourself, unless you can get some benefit from having them all on the QL of course! Report facilities available are good- when printed, they look professional.

Reports available are bank, ledger, and, by various accounts, VAT summary in a form that you can use to fill-in your VAT returns, and listings of all receipts and/or payments. These can be output to the screen, or to the printer, although you must have the right size of paper in, because you can't configure what it is expecting.

A Trading, Profit and Loss account can be prepared which is possibly the most important report of all- the bank manager will undoubtedly want one of these, and if you can just run one off on request... A year to date or end is also available. I suppose the figures could be printed to file with little difficulty, although this is not supported- this would be good, as you could then display the figures in Easel. If your figures are poor, a graph might reveal hidden strengths!

File handling and saving

It is very unlikely that you will put all your figures in in one go, so you will want to be able to save them as you go along, without ending-up with about twenty files, each containing twenty records! General Ledger stores all records in a single file, adding the new ones into the file with the old ones. (You load the old figures, add your new ones, and save the lot.)

File handling routines are supported to save and load the transaction file and to get directories of microdrives (how often have you saved a file onto a microdrive without a label because

it was handy, and then mixed it up with a group of other microdrives?), and erase files. You can't format a microdrive or any other medium unless you quit and go into SuperBASIC, or you break into the program, and then resume with GOTO 100, of course.

You are expected to save your records for each accounting period with an appropriate name, (eg DEC88 or WEEK1) and make back-ups yourself. If you exceed the limit on transactions in the period, you save a file with the name and some indication that it is a continuation of a previous one- you need to start a new accounting period in which only the bank and cash balances are carried forward. As the General Ledger doesn't support credit accounts this is no problems, and using the year to date/end option, you can get a full printed summary of all periods combined by putting all your accounts file through in order.

Conclusion- Worthwhile

"General Ledger" does not claim, or attempt, to teach you the basic rules of book-keeping. It does what it sets out to do well. I am satisfied with the product, and would be happy to recommend it to anyone who knows they need a cash accounting system only. The program does not require a large computer system- it works on standard QLs, using microdrives, although it will work on any system. At present, it is multi-tasking in SuperBASIC, with Quill and several other jobs...

Do remember, however, computer moral "Garbage In, Garbage Out!" In, other words, the output is only as good as what you type in. So type with care!

A Business Investigation

We'll be examining "The Small Traders Package" in detail in a future issue. That provides complementary features, offering greater sophistication, in that it offers you features necessary for a more complex business, such as maintaining various credit accounts.

The whole area of business packages on the QL is worthy of INVESTIGATION, and so a future issue will carry a run-down on what is still available.

Futura Keyboard

The Futura style keyboard by Spem in Italy was originally intended for the ill-fated Sandy "Futura" project. As this was abandoned at an apparently late stage, a number of items, this enhanced QL style keyboard included, were converted for use with the QL. A number of UK suppliers have badged it as their own QL product in the past.

The keyboard is an external unit that can be attached to the QL via ribbon cable, fitting into the usual socket strip for the keyboard membrane. By connecting in this manner, potential problems with KEYROW are avoided. The keyboard has a wonderful light touch in use, and you find yourself typing at unheard of speeds. With everything being where you're used to, you don't even have to learn new bad habits! It is light and supplied with pull-down feet to angle the keyboard as needed. It is finished, like the case, in two tones, grey and cream- very stylish.
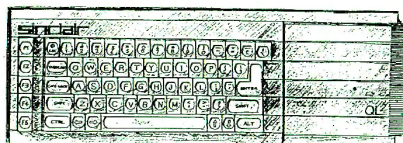
This means fitting it is simple. You just unscrew the top of the QL, being careful not to disconnect the LEDs on the old top from the circuit board, and plug in the new ribbon cable. The end is supplied attached to an edge-connector, so there is no difficulty in connecting it, or risk of breaking it. (You should have the power off to the QL as you are fiddling with it.)

Being careful that the top of the QL, (the old keyboard), is not touching any part of the QL PCB, (it should be able to sit behind the QL for now), you turn it on again, and Hey Presto! You should have a perfectly normal QL but with a much better keyboard- you press F1 or F2, and everything is as you would expect. If the keyboard is not working, then you just check the ribbon cable connection into the back of the keyboard- sometimes it comes loose from the socket to the PCB. It simply plugs in again if it happens.

The keyboard has 89 keys, the extra 24 provided as an enhancement to the standard QL one. Instead of the usual five function keys, there are ten, keys F6 to F10 being the equivalent of F1 to F5, with Shift. There is a numeric keypad, (particularly useful for those of you doing numeric data entry), on the right hand side. This has the necessary ÷,x,+,-,=,. keys available with a single keypress. The numeric pad is also home to a number of special functions- REG does CTRL F5 on a single key, DEL does and "_", and INS achieves ENTER. The central section of the keyboard is identical to the standard QL, complete with the cursor keys and the correct keytops!

Our engineer has developed an upgrade that you can have fitted at extra cost that makes REG give CTRL C and DEL give CTRL +. That is more logical and useful. Solutions to key bounce are available from some suppliers, but these can bring their own faults, and we have our doubts about them.

Fitting the keyboard is so simple you would be hard pressed to go wrong. As there are no LEDs to connect, fitting it is simpler than fitting a keyboard membrane, or the Schoen standard QL replacement top. (Reviewed in Iss#2)

There is no cover for the QL itself- you are expected to use the old keyboard. You are advised to cut a small slit in the front of the old case to bring the trailing ribbon cable out of. This may look strange, having two keyboards, one behind the other, and does mean that your system will take up twice as much space from front to back as normal- that applies to any external keyboard that you consider.

The suggested companion for "Futura" style keyboards is the Spem System/2 mounting kit. You can fit your QL, RAM cards, 3.5" disk drives, up to three interfaces, plus one plugging in externally, your microdrives, (and a hard disk if you have a CST SCSI), together with a QL power supply unit, all into the grey system unit, on which you can stand your monitor. All the connectors down the back of the QL' are still available, so it remains completely compatible with the QL. Fitting isn't easy, but you end up with a smart unit, similar in concept to a "Thor", but perhaps not as neat. We expect to review it next issue...

Personally, I recommend the "Futura" style keyboard, as it offers quality without sacrificing compatibility. It is not cheap, but a good investment.

It is most unfortunate that this review has had to edited in view of Sandy UK, (Power Computing), withdrawing from the QL market almost overnight. The product which, up to now, has been a consistent best seller along with the Miracle Systems "Trump Card" series, is now no longer available. We use both SuperQboards and Trump Cards ourselves. We have reviewed this product, even though it is presently unavailable, because you may find a second hand unit to be a very good value buy.

The "SuperQboard" series was definitely the best conceived QL expansion board from the point of view of "value for money". From a technical point of view, they were the most "elegant" solution to the problem of expanding a QL to include all the popular extra expansions. They include a RAM expansion, (of 512k to give the official maximum, 640k), a disk interface (for dual drives), and a parallel port, (for easy connection of standard printers, and fast transmission of data,) as well as a range of useful utilities on a ROM- later even a mouse!
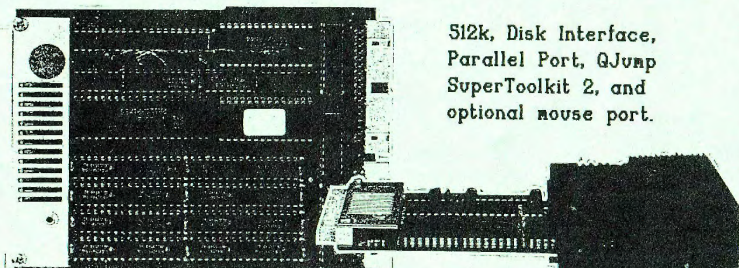
512k, Disk Interface, Parallel Port, QJump SuperToolkit 2, and optional mouse port.

THE UNIT IS COMPACT AND WELL DESIGNED

A similar "all in one" expansion was available from MCS, this being the MCS "Memodisk". Although technically very similar, if a little less elegant, it was badly let down in comparison with the SuperQboard by only having MCS in-house software support. This software on ROM was not bad, but any QL floppy disk interface is at a disadvantage if it does not have the QJump "Qflp" device driver software which is considered to be the "necessary" standard. Other resident extensions were either supplied on ROM or on a disk, and although competent, were rather non-standard, again making them less attractive.

The Trump Card was a formidable opponent to the SuperQboard- to remind those of you who have not read our review (Iss. #1) it offers either 256k, 512k, or 768k of RAM expansion, taking the QL over the official "limit" for RAM expansion of 640k, to a unique 896k RAM for the 768k TrumpCard. It also offers a disk interface suitable for dual disk drives, and various utilities, including QJump Toolkit 2, and screendump on ROM.

Apart from the ill-fated Medic expansion units that were available in the compatively early days of the QL, there were no other similar units available, giving the SuperQboard a rather attractive position of dominance in the QL market. It has certain "pros" and "cons" when compared with a 512k Trump Card which would be the nearest competitor. The most obvious benefits are its size, (being shorter and neater), and the parallel port which saves buying a ser to parallel converter. The mouse version is my favourite, and "does everything!"

21
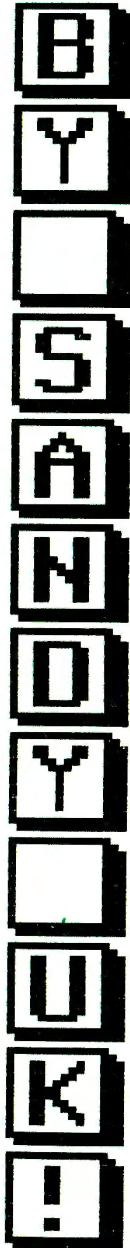
The SuperQboard has come in a number of versions during the time it was available. The first versions have all the RAM on the main circuit board, but the later versions have a piggy-back RAM board, utilising an incredible chip density that has to be seen to be believed... Even that version was surpassed by the version which includes a QIMI compatible mouse socket- mice were usually standard. Versions of each were available in either zero k, or 512k versions, each in the standard QL plastic expansion case, adding just 2" to the QL's length.

The early units only had limited ROM utilities, but the later versions had full QJump Toolkit 2, and RAM disk software. The last version, that including a mouse interface, was supplied with Toolkit 2, and the POINTER real-windowing environment on ROM, but no RAM disk. All the other software was the same- a RAM disk and copy of QRAM was included with a mouse version. The POINTER command on mouse versions is (very) convenient!

The disk interface conforms to the Sinclair standard for the QL, but the device driver is Qjump "Qflp". Any compatible disk drives work fine, the popular NEC drives being among the best available. The Miracle Systems drives are compatible, although in most cases if a SuperQboard is sold second hand, it will come with the excellent Sandy disk drives that were supplied for it. The SuperQboard will support up to two 3", 3.5", or 5.25" disk drives. I have heard 8" could work but I am told they won't- drives need a "Shugart" type interface. A more detailed explanation was printed in the "Intro" issue. The parallel port is very useful, very fast, and very easy to set-up for use with your programs. It uses the name PAR, and an optional "_" and size in k/bytes will set-up a printer buffer. The interface uses the external interrupt which means that when text is printed, the QL continues to send data to the printer continuously- data can be transmitted by parallel interfaces much quicker than by the QL's serial interfaces.

Despite adding three or four different expansions to the QL, the SuperQboard still conforms to the Sinclair expansion card convention- this means, that should a suitable multiple slot expansion unit become available to you, you could plug-in the card, together with a QJump "QEP-III" eprom programmer, an ABC QSound/QPrint, or maybe a CST SCSI hard disk interface. This should be possible, although in practice, no suitable QL multiple slot expansion units are, of have been, available.

Bearing in mind that the "SuperQboard" is no longer available and that Sandy/Power Computing is no longer interested in the QL market, support and repair of the unit is not guaranteed. As we have three SuperQboards, this is of particular concern to us, but as yet we have no guaranteed solution- the unit uses special chips, (PALs), which if faulty, cannot easily be replaced. They were specially "programmed" to Sandy design. If you buy a SuperQboard, you will probably have to consider it to be a good, reliable buy, but more or less a gamble with regard to its life, as repairs will probably be unavailable.

If you do buy one anyway, I am sure that those of you who are happy with 640k, or have plans to use other expansion cards with your QL, will be particularly pleased with it, and will appreciate the special features- the parallel port, and if fitted, the mouse port. The low-profile design is excellent. We thoroughly recommend SuperQBoards from our own experience, but urge you to consider carefully whether a SuperQboard or a Trump Card offers the most useful features for your purpose.

Learning to live with QL mice

QJump have usually been involved with hardware indirectly, with software for the QL apparently always taking higher priority. The famous "QEP-III" eprom programmer was the only other badged QJump QL hardware before QIMI- the "QL Internal Mouse Interface" for POINTER.

You can fit the interface yourself, or have it fitted by a repair firm. The unit plugs into one ULA socket, and one ROM socket. The chips then plug back into the the QIMI circuit board, and a trailing ribbon cable is run out through the SER1 port to a standard nine pin ("D") socket. This socket allows you to plug-in suitable mice- for example the Atari ST one, or I think even the "ABC Elektronic" one once supplied as the ABC Giga Mouse.

As a mouse interface for the QL, it is technically superior to any other, but it still lacks the range of soft- ware support that one should expect. The PCB is small, only 2.75" by 2.4", even measuring the extremes. That is larger than the PCB, because of chip sockets. It even uses surface mounted chips!

It is easy to fit, but if you are not reasonably happy about opening up the QL, and handling components, then we advise you to get it fitted. The unit is well built, but necessarily, very "delicate". You can't fit QIMI if you already have a clock battery back-up, or any similar add-on that occupies the inside of the QL- in particular the right ROM socket, or the ZX8302 socket, both at the central rear.

No software is supplied with the QIMI unit as it was designed to complement the enhanced software environment provided by the QJump POINTER system.

Do not think that by fitting a QIMI to your QL, you will be able to use a mouse with all your software- a mouse is a newcomer to the QL, and only a percentage of software will support one. Most software is written to be controlled by keyboard or joystick. One advantage with recent versions of POINTER is that if you hold down the left cursor whilst moving the mouse, you can produce cursor keystokes in incompatible applications, and mouse buttons can emulate SPACE and ENTER.

Another difficulty is that there have been several mouse add-ons for the QL, each gaining support, but none sweeping the board. The prestige of QJump, and the declining fortunes of any competitors should make the QIMI unit the favourite*for most users in future, especially as the support for the POINTER environment increases.

The "Smiling Mouse" is a product that is no longer available for the QL. It was produced by Smiling Software, a small part-time supplier that is no longer trading. It was also available from Gap Software for a short time.

The Smiling Mouse does not merit more than a passing mention, but in view of the support given to it recently by a couple of software suppliers, in particular, "Digital Precision", we will examine the mouse and interface as last available from any supplier.

The "Smiling Mouse" itself is purely and simply an Atari ST mouse with the nine pin "D" plug cut off, and a bare board interface connected to it. Of course, having the bare board plugged into the ROM socket is rather dodgy, and does not exactly look hi-tech.

Software supplied with the interface was rather a mixed bag- some of the software, in particular some resident extensions, do their jobs quite well, while some of the SuperBASIC programs included should only be described as embarrassing, having major failings.

Support for existing software is on the basis that routines supplied will make the mouse emulate the cursors and the space and ENTER buttons. The emulation is adjustable, but in most cases the cursor darts around, unable to work out in which direction to go. Routines are supplied to support the mouse directly, but they are simple, and you need to do most of the work.

Or tame a mouse with ICE?

As we have reviewed ICE elsewhere in this issue, all that needs to be said about the mouse is that it is a smart black unit that could once be bought to plug into your existing ICE ROM as an upgrade, but must now be bought together with ICE as a combined unit. The mouse was available in two styles but the standard mouse is now black with three bright red/orange buttons.

The mouse will work with existing ICE applications only- and is required for some to work. In most cases, it is in addition to the usual control by the keyboard or joystick, however, and gives smooth movement of the on-screen pointer, ideal for drawing in the "Mouse Art" graphics package with which it was supplied at one time.

Choose a mouse you like...

Choosing a mouse is a hard decision. Go on what you feel- choose the one that suits your existing system best.■

PROTOCOL CONVERTER

Prestel QLeaps, and QL Bulletin Boards

Hello again. I hope that you have all been busily computing away on-line without too much interruption from line-noise or British Telecom. The world of comms since last issue has been as lively as usual. We have some good news, and some not so good news. We'll tell you the good news first...

QNet2 now QNet3- "QLeaps"

We are now editing/updating "QLeaps" on Prestel. This has replaced the "QNet2" section that used to support the QL via ClubSpot 810 on Prestel. I am editing this area personally, with the occasional assistance of Julie, my wife. At present we do everything, but we do have someone else in line to help us update the area regularly. At present the area is still using the old database pages, and we are going through updating the area one page at a time with QLeaps details.

The new areas of the database that we are planning will follow the general format of "QL SUB", in that we will have an area for editorial, latest news, gossip, letters from readers, hardware and software reviews, comms and on-line services, a QL problems and answers from readers area, a QL software library, (the telesoftware area that QNet2 promoted, but that required a special QNet2 telesoftware down-loader is to be abandoned due to QNet2 software up-loader required for us to be able to add new software), a special QLeaps/QNet2 offers section, a section about support for the QL, and a section containing a list of all the QLeaps registered readers.

```
Help - F1   Tue 27 Jun 12:00:24   00:07:16
ClubSpot 810              8104240a        0p
                              Prestel QLeaps
QLeaps                          Main Index
                                (The Date)

 11 Latest Editorial      Our own bulletin
 12 QL News Updates       board- QLeaps At
 13 Gossip Columns        Home is running
 14 All Your Letters      on 0388-773737,
 15 Previews/Reviews      so why not call
 16 Product Support       it soon. We are
 21 Communications        Always keen for
 22 Software Library      visitors and the
 23 Reader Exchange       board is free to
 24 QL Support Guide      use- call soon..
 25 Special Offers
 26 QL QView Support

                          # Explanation

  7 = Talk to QLeaps      9 = More ClubSpot
  8 = Main Heading        0 = ClubSpot 810
```

Come and visit- type *QL#

If you use Prestel, then please type *QL# next time you log-on, and browse around the QLeaps area. Before you go and do whatever else you want, then please register with QLeaps- all you have to do is key 7 from any frame. The information you send will be kept confidential, but you will be put on a list of QLeaps readers unless you ask otherwise. This will only show your name and mailbox no., together with some details on your QL system.

Most "comms" packages support some system for storing page nos on set keys so that you can press the key to go to the desired pages- we suggest that you don't use these on QLeaps. Our plans require that we reorganise the pages, so page 810405 may be one thing one day, something else the next. The idea is like using gotos in programming- it can cause problems.

Speaking of comms packages, we are using the "QL Terminal" program as reviewed in issue 1- our comments on it still go, but our heavy use is now testing it to the limit. We find that the ability to save part of the page, and then transmit as either a page, or a mailbox is a very good feature. Tony Price, the author, is writing a version for the Atari ST- unlike the QL the ST is in dire need of anything remotely GOOD to use viewdata with, except a package that costs £100+...! Tony is also said to be working on a VT100 emulation for QL Terminal, and a few other nice updates to it.

RAWCOM- Surprising Quality

We have also "inherited" a copy of the Rawcom software by P. Rawlinson that QNet2 used to sell via QNet2. It is very flexible indeed, and although it is annoying in that it will not multi-task, and requires booting from microdrive or disk, it does have some features that are ideal for editors. We have found that Rawcom's "transmit mailboxes from a list" option superb! Instead of having to design a page and then repeatedly type new mailbox numbers, send, and then *00 to edit and send the frame again, Rawcom does all this tedious work automatically!

Send QLeaps Mail- PLEASE?

One thing that we have noticed about editing QLeaps so far is that hardly anybody sends any QL mail on Prestel- we thought it was just no mail to "QL SUB" that was going to be a problem. We really do need to hear from you.

Radio "Hams"- Step Forward

We know that some of you are radio "hams" if that is the right word- why not write an article on that subject?

Faulty Astracom Delays Us!

"QLeaps At Home" has hit a problem. We now have the modem, the Astracom AC1000, and we also have the "QView" software which will allow the QL to run a bulletin board with a large and varied database, using an Astracom.

The problem is that we sent our order off to Astracom, for the modem, and a few weeks later, it arrived, complete with a QL lead and power supply— but with no manual of any description... However, being equipped with Qualsoft "QL Terminal", we tried the modem and it totally failed to connect to any other service including Prestel which we access without problems with the Tandata Qconnect almost every day! It also failed to work with the "QView" software, and has continued to do so.

At present Astracom is trying to supply us with a new version of the AC1000 using the near-standard Hayes control codes, rather than their own "Native" protocol. (They tell that that is rather unreliable!) Each time we phone they have a new version— we will get a replacement eventually.

"QView" boards exist NOW!

We mentioned Laurence's board briefly last issue- it is run on 01-751-6096 using Ring-Back, and is available 24 hours a day. Laurence is a pleasant chap, and his board has a very chatty atmosphere. The pages are informal in layout, and the board has lots of sub editors who provide information on a range of subjects. The idea of the board seems to be public viewing of Lau's favourite pastimes etc.. the QL, programming, (he is a commercial "contract" programmer), and enjoying life. There may be a theme, but as far as I can tell, its all for fun!

Stuart's board is rather different. It's name comes from an episode of "Star Trek"- the board is dedicated to providing information on Star Trek and the computer that secretly runs the "Starship Enterprise", the QL. (Not may people know that...) Stuart has a lively editing style, and the board has a range of enterprising editors who provide interesting extra information on a range of subjects, in the same manner as on Lau's Place. Stuart has a fast-growing area for the QL "hidden away" on his main menu and it is full of useful information. "Atavachron" is on 0480-412884, using Ring-Back at anytime. Call it soon.

There is also another "QView" board that is run on a QL with Expanderam and microdrives only. It is called "The Rock" and deals with all sorts of things to do with fantasy gaming, and "Lord of the Rings" particularly. I'm afraid I haven't tried it so far.

Sector Software On-Line

Meanwhile, as we struggle to get our board off the ground, Stuart and Lau have sold the software and system to another QL user- "Sector Software". David Batty of Sector has become the chief guinea-pig on "QView", trying out the new features that keep being added, and checking that it's all ok. All I can say is that with our luck so far, bugged software, faulty modem and long delays in replacing them, we wish David the very best of luck...

His board offers QL news and updates on a range of subjects, naturally enough with a bias towards software from Sector and their other products. It is available outside his hours of business, 6pm to 8am, on the usual number: 0772-454328. (Direct dial- no ring back necessary) As Sector also sell hardware and software for the Z88, and other machines, the board will support the Z88 as well as QL. (Sector may do Amiga and ST too soon, so there may well be support for them too, but at present it's simply QL.)

What about other boards?

There are a range of other boards that may interest you- here is a small selection to try. Most use the Viewdata system (like Prestel) while others use an ascii terminal to show just plain text. Most boards have a list on them of other boards, and so you can increase you list as you go along. Some are more interesting that others, but it is really a matter of taste- therefore no recommendations.

* Atavachron   Viewdata QL QView
0480-412884   24 Hrs, Ring-Back
* Communitel Demo   Viewdata
01-968-7402   24 Hrs, Direct
* CP/M Users Group   Ascii
0753-868196   24 Hrs, Direct
* Gnome at Home   Viewdata
01-888-8894   24 hrs, Direct
• Viewdata QL QView
* Lau's Place
01-751-6096   24 Hrs, Ring-Back
* Magrathea   Viewdata
0376-24402   24 Hrs, Direct
* Peacenet   Viewdata
0383-620259   24 Hrs, Direct
* Phantom II   Viewdata
0226-202825   8pm-8am, Direct
* Prometheus   Viewdata
01-300-7171   24Hrs, Direct
* The Rock   Viewdata QL QView
0203-473558   24 Hrs, Ring-Back
* Sector Software   Viewdata QL QView
0772-454328   Weekends & 8am-8pm
* Sinclair Users   Ascii
01-249-3238   24 Hrs, Direct
* Vampires Coffin   Viewdata
0932-245593   24 Hrs, Direct

More on bulletin boards next issue. Until then, have fun, but remember- calling them becomes addictive, and can seriously damage your wealth...!

MANUAL RESPONSE

RESIDENT PROBLEMS?

Last issue we looked at how to set-up printer drivers in the Psion suite, and how to set their defaults- what they should save flles onto, print to and so on, if not told otherwise: We did not describe any problems with setting up the boot file. This cannot be done with config_bas, as this is only for the program itself- "Quill" etc., not boot files first supplied.

Beginners Can Manage This

For those of you who just want to set up Quill etc. to work off disk drives then here is a brief explanatlon for you. You can read our more complete notes at some later date of course! As a beginner you may find the idea of using BASIC worrying. Don't! To those of you who are beyond this "novice" stage, we make no apology. Everyone was a beginner some time!

Press F1 or F2 as usual, but ensure you have no disks or microdrives in. Type LOAD mdv1_boot, and press ENTER with one of your original cartridges in microdrive 1. When BASIC's cursor starts to flash again, type LIST and press ENTER. You will have a listing of the boot program. You will see a line that says EXEC_W mdv1_ and the name of the program. Note the number on the left of the instruction. This determines, logically enough, the position in the execution order, of the instruction on that line. Now type EDIT and the number, separated by a space. The line will appear in the bottom window with your cursor. Change the mdv to flp, or whatever, and press ENTER. That's it changed. Now all you need to do is save it. Using your back-up copy, DELETE the boot program- DELETE mdv1_boot, or DELETE flp1_boot as appropriate. Now type SAVE mdv1_boot etc. Just do the same for each program to be changed.

Convert- our PD solution

If you have a program on microdrive and you want to transfer it to disk, (and it uses no special protection), but you feel hampered by the problem of setting it up to work off disk, in most cases, a little public domain program we have written will sort it out- it is called "Convert" and is designed to replace any string with any other string of the same length in any file. This means you can set up any program that can't directly be configured with a utility, to use a new load/save device, or print to a parallel (par_) port instead of the serial one (ser1) port too of course! You could also correct spelling miztaiks in adventure games perhaps...

We have decided to have a look at the general area of boot files, and the joining together of more than one boot into a general purpose one- you can then use the multi-boot program to load up, and select from a number of programs, without resetting, and starting from scratch every time.

Many of those of you with expanded QLs will already be using some form of commercial boot program such as Sector "Taskmaster", the Compware "Taskswopper", or the QJump "QRAM" or "Hotkey System 2" utility programs. For those of you, the question may not seem as important, but in fact you will find that to make maximum use of the programs, you will find a need to devise large boot routines.

Summary of Resident Ext's

We have discussed resident extensions before, briefly, but we will just go over them to refresh your memory in view of their real importance to the present subject. Resident extensions are pieces of machine code that have been written to add features to the QL operating system or SuperBASIC. They usually take the form of keyword extensions, new device drivers, (for example to improve screen handling, microdrives or serial printer output) or apparently invisible improvements.

Common examples that you will find in most popular programs today are the Turbo Toolkit or QLiberator runtimes, (for programs written with SuperBASIC compilers), extensions unique to the program concerned such as the special "virtual page" handling routines in Page Designer 2, or various other QL enhancements, new device drivers such as the Speedscreen or Lightning now widely available.

Making QL work easier...?

If you use an expanded QL, with extra RAM and/or disk drives, then you may wish to do as we do, and produce a general purpose boot program from which you can load most programs you will want to use, without having to re-boot the machine. If you need to re-boot every time you want to change from one task to another, you cannot concentrate on doing the job, as you become concerned with the "mechanics" of using a computer, rather than the effects- the benefits of using one.

Not easy area to explain

This is not an easy area to explain. In this article, the first of two, we will look at the commands and parts of the QL operating system involved.

First things first. Memory is set aside for resident extensions in a number of ways. You may see many programs that include statements in the form; "LET x=RESPR(n): LBYTES mdv1_extras,x: CALL x" where n is the required amount of space. The RESPR function allocates RAM from the QL's RESident PRocedure area. This can only be done when there are no jobs running, due to the way in which the QL allocates and uses RAM. This is NOT a bug. It's essential good sense. QJump SuperToolkit 2 includes a new keyword called LRESPR that condenses these 3 commands into one simple one.

Common heap? What is it?

There is also a new function called ALCHP that ALlocates Common HeaP. The Turbo Toolkit supplied with Digital's Turbo compiler offers ALLOCATION that does the same. A DEALLOCATE command is also available to free RAM already reserved. From BASIC, both allocate RAM to BASIC, but when compiled, they make it available to the calling job. This is vital otherwise BASIC could free memory allocated by a job while it is in use, or vice versa. Toolkit 2 has a CLCHP command that frees any common heap RAM allocated by BASIC.

The common heap is different from the resident procedure area because it can be allocated at any time. Doing this may sound convenient, but it can split RAM into little sections over a period of time, meaning that even on a QL with 512k extra RAM, you may be unable to load even Quill! This is "Heap Fragmentation" to be technical.

What is common to both common heap and resident procedure space is that it can only be allocated by QDOS in blocks of half a K, 512 bytes. That means that although programs may use "silly" values such as 212 bytes in a RESPR function call, they will really be allocating at least half a K. This has led to a number of boot programs being written to save precious RAM! (If you find a program that uses a single RESPR statement and then loads in code using LBYTES into this area with various offsets, calling each as they are loaded, or all at the end, the probable purpose is to save RAM.)

Sophisticated boot files?

I can't see any way of explaining the idea of common heap or resident procedure space any more easily. You will require a simple understanding of the ideas to be able to set-up your own more sophisticated boot programs if they incorporate popular extensions.

Once all the space has been allocated and the code has been loaded in, the code is invariably CALLed. The result of doing this may not, depending on your ROM, however, be immediately obvious due to a bug in earlier ROMs. On ROM versions prior to MG, any new keywords are not available until a MERGE, LOAD, or NEW command has been performed. This is why some programs MRUN BASIC overlays into the boot. Just merging all these lines of code into a new program won't work if you have JM (or pre-JS) ROMs. The order was FB, PM, AH, JM, JS and then MG.

There is an annoying type of code extension in use by some suppliers. It is a RESPR allocation, load, and call that uses part of the RESPR area as workspace. This is not permitted, as the code should use common heap. The result is that if you allocate the appropriate amount of space for the file, and CALL it, the system is corrupted (the memory after the area allocated is overwritten for data,) and there is a high likelyhood that your QL will subsequently crash... If the size of the file does not match the amount of RAM allocated, it may be a mistake, but be very cautious.

Add line nos to boot safe

Incidentally, you would usually be well advised to put line nos on any boot programs that MERGE lines of code or direct commands into the boot program. A merged file of commands is not closed when finished, which means that you can't change cartridge/disk. You will get the "in use" error! The easy way to add line nos is to type "AUTO: MERGE mdv1_filename" (where the filename is the name of the file without linenos,) and press ENTER. The Toolkit 2 "DO" command is better, as it DOES close the file afterwards!

FLP_USE mdv- Easy Answer

Finally, if you have a really awkward program that refuses to transfer from microdrive to disk, or that will only work on a standard machine, a simple solution may be the easiest. Consider the built-in features of your disk interface or toolkit. You will always have a FLP_USE MDV command or FSET equivalent, and these simple commands will often let you copy programs onto disk without even telling a program! The program is told the flp is mdv.

We will be looking at saving RAM in the next issue, and offering you all some useful example boot procedures to get you past awkward programs that require special commands, or need a number of extensions loading in a particular order. These can be the most infuriating to sort out as there is usually nothing visibly incorrect.

Until then, remember, only a small number of the "crimes" you have read about in this article are common... Most programs are simple to set-up. Anyway, WE are always here to help, and YOU have learnt more about QDOS!

27

Finest Hardcopy

The program listed on the right was to have been published last issue, but lack of space pushed it out. As you will probably have noticed, this issue is larger, so we have a bumper four pages for useful listings that you may find can save you time, effort, and by saving you buying programs, money.

This SuperBASIC program is a general purpose boot that can save those of you without commercial systems like "Task Master" or "QRAM", having to reset your machines each time you run a new program. We will be publishing our own useful "front-end" program in a future issue- we are still adding finishing touches at the moment.

Useful MultiBoot

The program is very simple to use. (I think.) Quite a few members already have it, and have found it useful. Setting-up the system relies on you having a very small familiarity with SuperBASIC, and the QL's line editor.

There can be up to nine lines of data statements that start from line 530. These take the form described below-

DATA name$, extension$, type$, text$

1 name$-
    program name shown on screen
2 extension$-
    any file extension such as _BAS, _EXE, _TASK that may be on the end of the program name on the microdrive, or disk, but would confuse on screen.
3 type$-
    "x" for a multi-tasking program, or "b" for other Superbasic programs.
4 text$-
    description of what a program does

Examples to demonstrate the method are in the program listing- you would set Quill up as listed on line 530.

Briefly the program sets-up arrays to hold the details of the menu items, and then reads in up to nine items from appropriate data statements just described. (You cannot add too many data statements...) It then displays the menu, and waits for you to press a key, between "1" and "0". "0" is special, in that it aborts the menu system, and deletes it from memory.

Line nos are irrelevent. You can add any lines that you might need to, and RENUMBER the program without causing any problems. If you using programs that you can alter, then add in the following line at the end- if it ends in NEW or STOP, replace it with LRUN mdv1_multi_boot to reload menus.

```
100 dev1$="flp1_"
110 DIM
prog$(9,10),exten$(9,10),type$(9),desc
r$(9,20)
120 REPeat forever
130     MODE 4
140     OPEN#3,scr: INK#3,4:
BORDER#3,1,255: CLS#3
150     CSIZE#3,2,1:
PRINT#3;centre$(37,'Example QL Boot
System')
160     CSIZE#3,0,0:
PRINT#3;centre$(74,'@1988 "QL SUB"')
170     PRINT#3
180     CSIZE#3,1,0
190     RESTORE
200     FOR loop=1 TO 9
210       IF EOF: EXIT loop: END IF
220       READ prog$(loop)
230       READ exten$(loop)
240       READ type$(loop)
250       READ descr$(loop)
260         PRINT#3;,loop;"
";prog$(loop),descr$(loop)
270     END FOR loop
280     PRINT#3
290     PRINT#3;,"0    Exit back to
SuperBASIC"
300     PRINT#3
310     PRINT#3;centre$(55,"Press
1-"&(loop-1)&" to Start Program ");
320     REPeat choose
330       LET num$=INKEY$(-1)
340       IF num$>="0" AND num$<="9":
EXIT choose: END IF
350     END REPeat choose
360     PRINT#3;num$
370     IF num$="0": EXIT forever: END
IF
380     PRINT#3\\centre$(55,"Starting
"&prog$(num$))
390     IF type$(num$)="x"
400       EXEC_W
dev1$&prog$(num$)&exten$(num$)
410     ELSE
420       IF type$(num$)="b"
430         LRUN
dev1$&prog$(num$)&exten$(num$)
440       END IF
450     END IF
460 END REPeat forever
470 NEW
480 :
490 DEFine FuNction
centre$(cols,text$)
500 RETurn FILL$("
",(cols-LEN(text$))/2)&text$
510 END DEFine centre$
520 :
530 DATA
"Quill","","x","Word-processor"
540 DATA "Abacus","","x","Spreadsheet"
550 DATA "Archive","","x","Database
Manager"
560 DATA "Easel","","x","Business
Graphics"
570 DATA "Install","_bas","b","Printer
Set-Up"
580 DATA "Game","_EXE","-","For
Relaxation"
```

A Better Boot?

If you have already read the "Manual Response" article in this issue, then you will now know all about resident extensions! If you are using programs that use any of the extensions, then we suggest that you load them in in a previous boot program. This program could also be used to set the clock.

It is better to set the clock and do anything like load extensions in a seperate program, rather than add the lines of the program to the start of any other programs you may be using. If you do that, SuperBASIC uses up more memory than usual, and so you may find that your existing programs will not run on a standard QL- if you put them in a boot program, and you then load the original boot, then you will find that the memory used up by the new boot is cleared, and so your old boot program will still run ok. (In theory- there are exceptions...)

You need load in resident extensions only once. In some cases you would crash the QL if you load them in more than once. This is why you need to seperate the boot program from the "multi_boot" program, the menu one. Any other course of action would lead to unacceptable problems, and a waste of memory- each time you changed from one program to another, you would be loading in the same extensions again!

How about this!

The program on the right would be ok, and not too long-winded. It loads in any necessary resident extensions, and then sets the system clock using calls to a useful basic function that checks the range of positive numeric input statements in the input window.

The REMark statements at the start are purely as an example. If you have Qjump Super Toolkit 2, then you can modify the method for loading code. You could put TK2_EXT in at the start of the program, and then use LRESPR, a command only added by the toolkit.

All Structured

Again, like "Multi-Boot", there is no problem with line nos- there are no gotos, so you can add lines, without having to worry about causing bugs. It is always our practice to write without using any version dependent code, or structure that will cause problems when the program is altered.

Trivial But Ok?

Both these programs are very trivial, but we know that lots of readers are still struggling on without anything even this sophisticated. We hope that those of you struggling like them...

```
100 MODE 4
110 LET dev1$="mdv1_"
120 :
130 REMark x=respr(8192)
140 REMark lbytes dev1$&"extras",x
150 REMark call x
160 :
170 DIM check$(12,3)
180 RESTORE
190 FOR loop=1 TO 12
200   READ check$(loop)
210 END FOR loop
220 REPeat set_date
230   LET datenow$=DATE$
240   LET year$=datenow$(1 TO 4)
250   LET month$=datenow$(6 TO 8)
260   LET DAYno$=datenow$(10 TO 11)
270   LET hour$=datenow$(13 TO 14)
280   LET mins$=datenow$(16 TO 17)
290   LET secs$=datenow$(19 TO 20)
300   FOR loop=1 TO 12
310     IF month$==check$(loop)
320       LET month$=loop
330       EXIT loop
340     END IF
350   END FOR loop
360   year=get_input("Year ? ",year$,1
989,2001)
370   month=get_input("Month? ",month$
,1,12)
380   dayno=get_input("Day  ? ",DAYno$
,1,31)
390   hour=get_input("Hour ? ",hour$,1
,23)
400   mins=get_input("Mins ? ",mins$,1
,59)
410   secs=get_input("Secs ? ",secs$,1
,59)
420   SDATE year,month,dayno,hour,mins
,secs
430   PRINT#0;DATE$
440   INPUT#0;"Is this date correct? "
;ok$
450   LET ok$=ok$&"n"
460   IF ok$(1)=="y": EXIT set_date: E
ND IF
470 END REPeat set_date
480 LRUN dev1$&"multi_boot"
490 :
500 DEFine FuNction get_input(text$,va
r$,min,max)
510 LOCal temp$
520 REPeat get_inp
530   INPUT#0;(text$);"(";(var$);") ";
temp$
540   temp="0"&temp$
550   IF temp=0: LET temp=var$: END IF
560   IF temp>=min AND temp<=max
570     EXIT get_inp
580   END IF
590   PRINT#0;"Bad parameter, try agai
n"
600 END REPeat get_inp
610 RETurn temp
620 END IF
630 :
640 DATA "jan","feb","mar","apr","may"
,"jun","jul","aug","sep","oct","nov","
dec"
```

You could easily compile the clock set routines, but the LRUN statement would be rejected by the compilers. The boot is easy to alter, but if you get stuck then please don't hesitate to ask us.

Backseat Drive

Using copious instructions from our previous "Manual Response" articles, you should be able to set-up your printer- the limit may be translates.

There is a problem associated with the use of translate codes for Psion and other packages. In the case of Quill, there is only a facility for 10 translates. This can be somewhat limiting, especially if you need to use the foreign characters hidden in the QL character set- codes 128 up.

Easy SuperBASIC Solution

The program written in SuperBASIC is a useful and effective routine that will allow you up to 256 translates, that is one for every character on the QL! Each translate can have up to 20 characters associated with it. For example, a single character could be used to print a whole sentence, or a standard heading or a footer perhaps.
I can also see a way that users with problems over the page nos that Quill can handle (only up to 255), can now easily and effectively add a "fudge". There is naturally no way to cure the Quill program directly, but by adding new lines, to the program listed, any character can be used as a decimal no that is automatically incremented. (It is not elegent, just effective.)

```
242 REPeat get_pageno
245    pageno>"0"&min_input$("Start Pa
ge No? ",1)
246 IF pageno>0: EXIT get_pageno
247 END REPeat get_pageno
275 IF tran$(CODE(char$))="*PAGENO*":
PRINT#4;pageno;: LET pageno=pageno+1:
END IF
```

All you do to get an incrementing no anywhere in your document is add the following to your footer in Quill.
Page No. μA
(μ=CTRL SHIFT P, A=CTRL SHIFT J)

This presumes that you have a line in your translates section that says-
eg DATA 1,"μ","*PAGENO*"

The "A" is a character presently set up as a new line character, so that the page no is at the line end. You could use auto-increment translates too- to do the numbering on lists too-

μ Introduction   (Prints 1 Intro...)
μ Background   (Prints 2 Backg...)
μ Main Body   (Prints 3 Main ...)
and so on...

This presumes that you typed in 1 as the Start Page No- if you had typed in 1000; numbers would start at 1000! You can therefore renumber lists etc...

```
100 LET dev$="flp2_"
110 DIM tran$(256,20)
120 FOR loop=1 TO 256: LET tran$(loop
=CHR$(loop)
130 RESTORE
140 FOR read_trans=1 TO 256
150    IF EOF: EXIT read_trans
160    READ type
170    IF type=0: READ tran: ELSE : RE
D char$: LET tran=CODE(char$): END IF
180    READ translate$
190    LET tran$(tran)=translate$
200 END FOR read_trans
210 filename$=min_input$("File to pro
ess? ",6)
220 OPEN_IN#3,filename$
230 filename$=min_input$("Output devi
e? ",3)
240 OPEN_NEW#4,filename$
250 REPeat do_trans
260    IF EOF(#3) : EXIT do_trans: END
F
270    char$=INKEY$(#3)
280    IF tran$(CODE(char$))="*INCLUDE
" OR tran$(CODE(char$))="*INFIXED*"
290       IF tran$(CODE(char$))="*INCLU
E*"
300          LET filename$=""
310          REPeat read_filename
320             IF EOF(#3) : EXIT read_fil
name: END IF
330             char$=INKEY$(#3)
340             IF tran$(CODE(char$))="*I
CLUDE*": EXIT read_filename
350             LET filename$=filename$&c
ar$
360          END REPeat read_filename
370       ELSE
380          LET filename$=dev$&"BACKS_I
C"
390       END IF
400       IF filename$<>""
410          OPEN_IN#5,filename$
420          REPeat send_file
430             IF EOF(#5) : EXIT send_fil
: END IF
440             PRINT#4;INKEY$(#5);
450          END REPeat send_file
460          CLOSE#5
470       END IF
480    ELSE
490       PRINT#4;tran$(CODE(char$));
500    END IF
510 END REPeat do_trans
520 CLOSE#3
530 CLOSE#4
540 STOP
550 :
560 DEFine FuNction min_input$(prompt$
,length)
570 REPeat do_input
580    INPUT#0;(prompt$);text$
590    IF LEN(text$)>length: EXIT do_i
put: END IF
600 END REPeat do_input
610 RETurn text$
620 END DEFine min_input$
630 :
640 REMark start of translates
650 DATA 1,"é",CHR$(27)
660 DATA 1,"A",CHR$(10)
670 DATA 1,"N","*INCLUDE*"
680 DATA 1,"0","*INFIXED*"
690 DATA 0,10,chr$(13)&chr$(10)
700 DATA 0,127,"0"&chr$(8)&"c"
710 REMark end of translates
```

Configuring Backseat Driver

The program does not use any clever configuration routine- you simple add data statements to it, of the type described here- no other data works!

DATA type, character, translate

Type-
  1 indicates that the character to be translated is stored as a string, and 0 indicates it is decimal number.

Character-
  The character either as a string, (in speech marks), or as a decimal no indicating its code- (See Character Set in Concepts of the User Guide)- print code("a") gives 97 and so on...

Translate-
  The string that you want to be used as the translate. If this is all to be alphanumerics, it can just be the text in speech marks- eg "Translate!" If it is going to be control codes, I am afraid you will have to indicate the codes using the chr$(n) function- eg chr$(27) gives ESCAPE. chr$(8) is the character to produce a backspace code. If you are putting several control codes together for a translate, you must "add them together" with the special SuperBASIC strings addition character- "&". eg chr$(27)&"L" or chr$(3)&chr$(10)&chr$(whatever)... There are no rules to how you mix the control codes or printable characters that you may set-up as any translate.

(We will add a nice method of setting up you translates at some later date for a software library version, but for the moment this will be enough.)

Translate EVERY character!

Now you can have a translate for all the characters on the QL keyboard, and you can print just about anything in the way of control codes... but we know that there are other things you would like to do. How about including standard paragraphs in your text, or maybe including graphics on the page. Well dream no more- this program can do just that- not dramatically fast, but during development, 100% right!!!

We have lines in this program that allow you to include files within the document from microdrive or disk. You simply set up a special character to specify that when it is found, the QL will read a filename and attempt to include the particular file at this point in the document. (Note, it does not use the translate codes on the include file- it is used unaltered.)

These are set up in in the listing as the "0" character (CTRL SHIFT F) for fixed include, and "Ñ" (CTRL SHIFT I) for general includes with filenames.

Backs_INC, the fixed include

The fixed include when used in any document looks automatically at a file called "backs_inc" and sends the contents of that file unaltered to the specified output device. This is useful if you want to translate a particular character into something that you can only put in a file.... We can't actually see the need for this, but if it isn't in there, one of you is bound to need to use it! You could, for example, translate a colon in your program listings to be help text from a file if desired!

General Include- Any File

The general include is a little more complicated to set up, but very very flexible. The include translate code that is set up in the listing is a "Ñ". When the program reads one, it will read the next characters from the file, until it finds another "Ñ" and use them as a filename- it then looks for the specified file to use as an include file which if it finds it ok, it sends to the output device.

The general include is easy to use- eg Ñflp1_text_incÑ or Ñmdv1_help_incÑ

These examples are text files- there is no reason why you can't include a graphics screen dump just as easily. We suggest that you put a Ñ before the include, and a Ñ after it so that the include starts on a new line, but it is best to experiment with useage.

The way to get a screendump to a file is not always so easy. You can direct some screen.dumps to a file, but if you are using the "gprint_prt" file (the standard print code), from Easel then you will need to make a copy of it, and then patch it to print to a disk. This should be done with some conversion program such as "convert". We'll explain this in detail later.

Backseat Driver £1.50 ware

If you want to add more attractive windows, then all you have to do is add the commands at the beginning. The program is structured, and will take other enhancements too. The program can be compiled, but this makes it harder to configure in its present form- you configure in BASIC.

The program's in our software library as "Backseat Driver" for £1.50 plus a microdrive or disk- if we must supply those, we charge an extra £1.50 for microdrive or 3.5" disk, or 75p for a 5.25" disk. It is "shareware", so if you like and use it, and want to get updates, you are asked to send a £5 registration fee to the author, 0EIS, c/o "QL SUB". As any updates develop, you'll be advised by post directly.

Join- Join Existing DBF Files

```
proc join
  open "mdv2_personal_dbf" as "main"
  open "mdv2_others_dbf" as "other"
  first "other"
  use "main"
  last "main"
  while not eof("other")
    let title$=other.title$
    let fname$=other.fname$
    let sname$=other.sname$
    let address$=other.address$
    let area$=other.area$
    let town$=other.town$
    let county$=other.county$
    let postcode$=other.postcode$
    let phone$=other.phone$
    let note$=other.note$
    let type$=other.type$
    let recdate$=other.recdate$
    append "main"
    next "other"
  endwhile
  close "other"
  close "main"
endproc
```

Recreate- Add Fields/Rename

```
proc recreate
  open "mdv2_personal_dbf" logical "ol
d"
  order surname$;a
  create "mdv1_personal_dbf" logical "
new"
    title$
    fname$:rem renamed from firstname$
    sname$:rem renamed from surname$
    address$
    area$:rem renamed from district$
    town$
    county$
    rem country$ not listed- deleted
    postcode$
    phone$:rem renamed from telephone$
    note$
    type$:rem newly added field
    recdate$:rem newly added field
  endcreate
  first "old"
  use "new"
  while not eof("old")
    let title$=old.title$
    let fname$=old.firstname$:rem rena
ming
    let sname$=old.surname$:rem renami
ng
    let address$=old.address$
    let area$=old.district$:rem renami
ng
    let town$=old.town$
    let county$=old.county$
    rem country$ not copied- deleted
    let postcode$=old.postcode$
    let phone$=old.telephone$:rem rena
ming
    let note$=old.note$
    let type$="?":rem initial setting
    let recdate$=date(1):rem initial s
etting
    append "new"
    next "old"
  endwhile
  close "old"
```

```
  close "new"
endproc
```

Search_all multi-file upgrade

```
proc search_all;thisname$,thistown$
  let ok$="y"
  use "member"
  locate thisname$
  while not eof() and thistown$<>town$
    next
  endwhile
  if eof()
    use "intro"
    locate thisname$
    while not eof() and thistown$<>tow
n$
      next
    endwhile
    if eof()
      let ok$="n"
    endif
  endif
endproc
```

Separate- Multi-file upgrade

```
proc separate
  first
  while not eof("personal")
    let temp$=old.type$
    if temp$="m"
      use "member"
    else
      use "intro"
    endif
    let title$=personal.title$
    let firstname$=personal.firstname$
    let surname$=personal.surname$
    let address$=personal.address$
    let district$=personal.district$
    let town$=personal.town$
    let county$=personal.county$
    let country$=personal.country$
    let postcode$=personal.postcode$
    let telephone$=personal.telephone$
    let note$=personal.note$
    let type$=personal.type$
    append
    next "personal"
  endwhile
endproc
```

*Explanation of Procedures

The "Archive" procedures above should
help those of you struggling with how
to use Archive, or our personal file
handling program, to make more of it.

1 Join does the obvious. It joins two
files containing similar fields, by
adding the contents of one to other.
2 Recreate creates new files and puts
all the records from another into it-
you can change names, add fields etc..
3 Search_all is search routine to use
if you have multiple _dbf files open.
4 Separate simply breaks files up, by
record type- useful if you are going
over to using multiple _dbf files.

Sorry if these instructions are brief
again. More next time about these and
other procedural improvements made!

QJump POINTER System

This issue, in response to a growing number of requests for an explanation about the system, we are taking a look at the QJump POINTER system that is now well established as a base for other programs on the QL. We have had to refer to Pointer before, but we have never had the opportunity to explain what it does, and examine how well it achieves the objectives that QJump describe in the documentation.

What exactly does it offer?

The Pointer system provides the real-windowing environment, with extended support for task switching, even to jobs that do not normally support it. Companion code, the window manager, offers support for extended screen handling features, giving programmers a standard set of QDOS calls (or with QPTR, the Pointer Toolkit, SuperBASIC keywords,) for the easy creation and manipulation of advanced windowing features such as scrolling or panning menu bars, icons, pull-down and pop-up menus, and other things. The idea is to save programmers re-inventing the wheel every time they start work on an application that uses these.

What does it mean in use?

A number of software suppliers who are growing in importance now accept the Pointer environment as a standard user interface, making learning each new package much easier. The idea is that once you have learnt one piece of software using the Pointer system, you will be able to learn how to use almost any other much more quickly than if you have to learn a new way to get from one menu to another, and how to select options from the menus.

In addition there are standard icons supported that allow you to move or re-size, (or "put to sleep" for later use) and quit from program windows. A pointer sprite is always present when you are not typing text, and this is incredibly clever in that it clearly indicates whether a window is waiting for text input, will not accept input or is "locked" by another program. It can also indicate if an area of the screen, apparently unused, is really being used by a program in another mode, by indicating such by changing to a sprite of a 4 or 8 in a box.

Other programs can set-up their own icons for use within their window space so a disk manager program may use a floppy disk icon, or a graphics package may use a little paintbrush.

The pile of program windows that is created when Pointer is used in one of the fundamental features of using an advanced windowing environment. A program that has its windows partly buried under the window of another program is suspended, (if it needs to use its window for output,) but if a program does is not using its window for text or graphics output, or it is placed somewhere where it is not obscured, then it can continue to run at the same time. This is exactly the same principle as applied on other machines that support multi-tasking and windowing such as the Amiga, and powerful multi-tasking workstations.

Mouse support incomparable

A mouse comes in particularly handy as rather than press CTRL C to switch from one job to another, you just move the mouse, and this "frees" the pointer from the application, and it can then roam round the screen, move program windows as required, and pick the desired program to the top again. The left mouse button on a mouse that is connected by the QIMI/SuperQboard mouse intefaces produces a space if the left button is pressed, or enter if the right button is pressed. One of the more recent developments was cursor emulation- so holding down the left mouse key and moving the mouse produces keystrokes that any program will think came direct from the QL keyboard. Pressing both mouse buttons at the same time can be trapped too.

Hot(!)key System Supported

An associated feature of the system is the hotkey support available. (The whole system was specified for the Sandy "Futura", and indeed, a 68020 based QLone with unlimited expansion facilities would be the ideal home for the Pointer environment. The spec for the Futura software environment will soon be matched in every respect by the Pointer environment...) Hotkey support means that by pressing ALT and a particular key, you can summon up a utility, application, command or macro sequence, or many other things.

A number of utilities are available with the Pointer environment. Grabber is capable of limiting RAM used by the Psion QL suite and others, and Guardian looks after the windows used by some older disruptive programs. Config is a program to set-up options in programs that use the QJump config format- an excellent idea that helps users to configure programs easily.

QJump's QRAM?

Those users who are not already using QRAM will almost certainly have seen it running at some time. It is ideal to use as a demonstration of the QL's power at computer shows. It really shows off the machine because it makes the QL look more like other new machines that use impressive windows, icons and mice, and proves that the QL can do such things even better...

```
  QUIT   FILES  Read Over All Info Sort: uNSDT          QUIT   JOBS
  HELP                                                  HELP
 View  Execute  Copy  Backup  Move  Delete Format     Go  Hold  Update
From: FLP1_qtyp_         ←x→ To: FLP2_doc             Next  Remove
MasterNET2 96/1512 sectors   MAC_3_DOC 8/1440 sectors
                                                         SuperBASIC
qtyp                         QUIT   PRINT             Buffer  Abort
Qtyp_file                    HELP
Qtyp_dictionary                     Read   All   Page  Usage: ser
qtyp_spell                    QUIT   QRAM  QUIT      Device: par
  QUIT   CHANNELS  Cl        HELP                      QUIT
  HELP                           utilities            HELP   DUMP
                              QUIT  HELP              Screen  Job  Window
CON_512x256a0x0        SuperBA     Files             Window  Invert  Mode 8
CON_256x172a256x41     SuperBA     Jobs
CON_256x172a0x41       SuperBA     Channels          vice: SER   Scale: 1
                                   Print
NSU                    Server      Window dump        inter  Epson FX80
                                   Options
```

Briefly, "QRAM" is a "pop-up" utility suite covering 5 applications. These are all selected from a pop-up menu that is summoned up with the "ALT /" keystroke. QRAM is "re-entrant" which means that you need only load up one copy of the program to be able to run several copies. You could, perhaps, have several QRAM options set-up, but buried under some other application, ready to bring to the top for further use on request. That is up to you.

Pop-up utilities examined!

"FILES", a powerful file management utility gives you a sorted directory of two drives, for example flp1_ and flp2_. You can start jobs, view, copy, backup, move or delete files in a number of ways, ordering them by date, size, type, and so on, and then selecting them from the scrolling list that is displayed. Full wildcard selection is supported by the Toolkit 2 method, so you can select all the files ending on flp1_ with fred_ in them and ending in _BAS. Versatile. A cautious format routine is included.

"JOBS" gives you control over jobs! You can kill them off, start and hold them, and you get a full list of what job is related to another job. The list can be updated at any time. You can also select any job this way too. The missing feature is any control over job priority- strange ommission. It will be used mostly for killing a job that is unwanted or has crashed.

"CHANNELS" gives you previously hard to get information about what's using what- you can find out which program is hogging the disc drive, or using the printer, and at your discretion, close the channels if you so wish. I say at your discretion, because not all jobs like having their window or printer port closed while in use!

"PRINT" gives you access to the QJump dynamic printer buffer. You can set the buffer up to intercept output to any device and divert to any other- you can use it to buffer ser output if you wish, or add a dynamic buffer to your parallel port. It is fine if you are not using the serial ports for comms- buffered communications is not advised and it does not work... You can also spool (print in the back ground) any files shown in the FILES style directory. That's very useful.

"WINDOW DUMP" offers you the facility to achieve fast screendumps in any of three sizes and several combinations. You can dump screens in mode 4 or 8, and invert images if you wish. When I say dump screens, that is inaccurate- you can dump the whole screen, or the areas used by jobs or windows too, and a wide range of printers are supported. The impressive feature is that the screen area to be dumped is "snap-shotted" to RAM, and so it is printed out correctly while you get on with something else, even if the display on screen changes during it.

Lastly, "OPTIONS" allows you to set such things as default drives and the printer port, mouse controls, and the default screen dump. These settings can then be saved to configure QRAM for future use when it is loaded up.

Extra Pointer utilities too

The utilities supplied with QRAM are the Grabber and Guardian programs, a QJump dynamic RAM disk and printer buffer, (one file,) and the pointer and window manager extensions. Most Pointer driven programs use WMAN, the window manager, and will not work without the window manager, although normal programs will multi-task with just the Pointer environment set-up so it's useful even without QRAM...

Looking forward to QRAM2

In the longer term, QRAM will become obsolete, as Qjump has a new version, "QRAM2" under final development. This will not be a single program with a number of "pop-up" menus like it is now- it will be more like "QPAC", a series of configurable pop-up tools. I look forward to this with interest, as it should herald an increase in power as dramatic as that achieved by QRAM compared with other front-ends.

QPTR- The Pointer Toolkit

We will be examining QJump's "Pointer Toolkit" in a future magazine. It is such a complicated, and powerful tool that it will deserve an investigation all of its own. I am presently trying to program using the toolkit- when I succeed a little, I will write more on the subject of using the package, and we will probably be carrying an article of getting going with it from a couple of people who have been looking into the effective use of it.

Advantages daunting to use!

To most programmers, the advantages of using the Pointer environment are attractive, but perhaps some of the new concepts to embrace are rather daunting to use. As the standard of QL software must continue to improve, and offer an up-to-date, friendly, user interface in future, Pointer is a ray of hope in a troubled world...

The QL was slow at gaining support in the early days because people were unable to program such a powerful machine, and were unfamiliar with the practices that were required to write efficient code for the 68008, and the QL's complex QDOS operating system.

Incompatible with DP Turbo

I hope that the same problem does not continue to stop QL programmers from using the environment. QJump have not gone particularly out of their way to encourage support, as the SuperBASIC keywords supplied require the passing and returning of arrays to procedures and functions, something which the Turbo and SuperCharge compilers can not do. QLiberator is completely able to handle this method, but is still much less popular with programmers as it does not produce such fast code.

The Pointer environment can be used from any powerful language however, so if you prefer to use C or assembly language, a full set of QDOS traps is documented, and suitable macros are supplied for assembler programmers, or users with a C compiler where they can include assembly language extras.

Support increasing steadily

There is not a vast amount of support for the Pointer system from existing QL software houses as yet(!), but the range of compatible software is being increased slowly and surely. To add to that, its powerful windowing is compatible with most programs, and most packages can multi-task with it. Of course, it is inactive until you ask it to operate, so you can choose.

More Pointer reviews soon

We will be examining new programs that exploit the POINTER environment, either requiring it to work, or doing as QLiberator, and using it if it is available, soon. I don't actually see there is any point in programs doing this, as it requires extra code to be written, and leads to a half-hearted result that does not exploit the real benefits of the system at all really.

We will be looking at QD and some other software from Jochen Merz soon, along with software from arch-rivals, Ultrasoft. Others to venture into using Pointer include the authors of QView, and a host of small European outlets that do not presently market products in the UK. It seems the place Pointer has caught on least is the UK... then again, in truth that was the case with the QL here too.

Upgraded QTyp2 available...

Another excellent piece of software from the QJump stable is "QTYP", now available in its second version, with a number of interesting enhancements, as QTYP 2. This program is available now, and upgrades to version 2 are available direct from Qjump. This is advisable, as there were a number of features that users felt were missing from the original version, included.

Thor XVI (16) is compatible

The final factor that should help the software houses to support Pointer is that the CST "Thor 16" is said to be able to run Pointer applications with none of the immediate problems caused by both Pointer and the CST extended screen drivers both trying to do the same thing, and getting mixed up that dogged the old CST Thor 1/20 series.

The one other common factor to all Pointer driven programs is that they require at least 384k expansion RAM, with 256k extra really required just to get going, Most programs are much happier with 512k plus, as the more programs you run, the more screen displays get saved- up to 32k each. A Thor 16 is probably an ideal machine to run such a system on- so I expect future Thor 16 programs to be Pointer compatible if at all possible. That can only be good news for QL users.

The verdict- a thumbs up!

You may have gathered that I am now a Pointer convert. It seems to me that the system can help to create software that is more easy to use on new QLones, and relies much less on using unreliable undocumented QL features.

QJump QTyp 2

Another piece of software by QJump that illustrates superbly what power can be achieved by a good programmer with a quality set of software tools is QTyp, now available in a revised version as QTyp 2. This is a spelling checker that checks what you type, as you type- real-time spell checking.
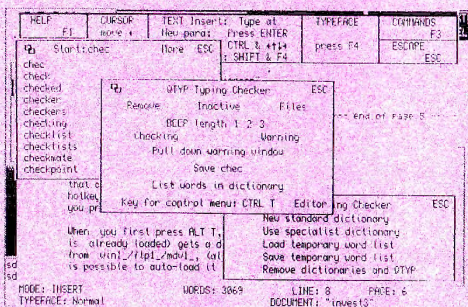
The first real-time spelling checker for the QL was "Spellbound", reviewed in the software section this issue. A certain amount of irritation was felt no doubt by Sector when soon after an attempt to get Spellbound to work on the QL with the Pointer environment, QJump announced QTyp in an advert. It did seem a bit "aggressive" to launch a new competing product so quickly.

In fact, although Spellbound is very well coded, it could not be converted to work with Pointer, and so QJump decided to write a new product that would be compatible. The program was more involved than expected, and it took some months to be produced, but the end result is a (system) spelling checker for the Pointer environment that will check spelling in any type of application, and the dictionary of which can be accessed as a resource belonging to the spell check device.

QTyp is supplied with a 45000 word English dictionary, although a German version is available. In addition to the Qtyp program, Pointer environment and utilities, QDOS extensions and a set of BASIC keywords and an existing file spell checker, there's a special program- the dictionary editor. This allows you to "dismantle" and rebuild a dictionary, or to create one from scratch. The advantage of course is that you could use one of the large public domain word lists for the PC that are supplied in ascii, and build a new dictionary of say 65000 words, in addition to any unusual "jargon".

In normal operation, you include code in your boot program to load in the QTyp resident extensions, and then you set-up a "hotkey" to load in QTyp when you press ALT T. The program is now supplied with the Hotkey System 2 that allows you to have any number of hotkeys active at any one time. (If you prefer you can use another key.)

When you first press ALT T, QTyp (it is already loaded) gets a dictionary from win1_/flp1_/mdv1_, (although it is possible to auto-load it on boot,) and activates it. Simply pressing ALT T in another job will start up the program in that one too. You can have several applications being checked at the same time if you wish, each spell check job using the one program- each is fully independent of course, so you can select different options for each.

Once activated, QTyp never goes off, unlike Spellbound. Whenever you type a word, it checks as you type, and it can highlight your mistake by beeping or by popping-up an error window. You can also select whether you want to have a constant reminder going as you type that it's on- a high pitch beep. It sometimes gets confused if you go and edit something somewhere else on the page, but in general it is particularly "robust" in how it checks.

Pressing CTRL T pops-up a option menu that allows you to temporarily change such things, and also allows you to remove that particular copy of the program. (You can remove the 75k of dictionary with a BASIC keyword.) The option menu also allows you to add a word to the additional word list- and you can save and load this whenever you wish. The difference between QTyp 1 and 2 is that you can also access the dictionary (a la Spellbound) and by pressing ENTER when an arrow is adjacent to the word you want, find and type in words that you just can't recall at the time- this works well.

Another use of the dictionary editor is that if you so wish, you can add a note to certain words- so for example if you type principal, you get a note popping-up saying "adjective!" and if you type principle you get a note in a pop-up window saying "noun!". These two are present in the standard copy of the dictionary- but you can add any that help you- for example, as I understand it, any of you who work for IBM will have been issue with a big "dictionary" of "IBM talk". This could be confirmed, as you type it.

Like any good product, QTyp has more to it, than a simple review can cover in reasonable detail. In particular, the ability to edit and add notes to the dictionary, and the versatile way in which it can be configured means that it has a multitude of uses. How about checking your programming...?

MOVING TARGET!
A LITTLE COMPETITION NEVER GOES AMISS, DON'T MISS THIS!

This issue, we have decided to appeal to those QL users with a little programming ability, or an artistic talent. That said, judging by previous competitions, no such users will bother to enter, so even if you think you can't draw, and you can't program at all then you are in with a very good chance. Intriguing isn't it...?

What we want you to do is create a demo that shows off the QL graphically. Perhaps a space scene with a starry background or a view of the sea washing up on a deserted beach... If the QL or Thor or a compatible can be illustrated too, all the better. I have a few ideas myself, but unfortunately I can't enter as I am going to be one of the judges. (I do have a B at 'A' level Art.)

Before you turn over the page, let me put a few ideas in your mind about this competition. We will award 2 prizes. These will be to the winners in 2 classes. 128k *and* 512k max.. The idea of this is to be fair. What you do in your memory "class" is up to you. It doesn't matter if you write a super machine code routine to draw 3D polygons in real time, or draw all your images in a graphics package and save them onto microdrive, then *zap* them all onto the screen in sequence using a RAM disk. If you get a little stuck, you can even give us a ring for advice! It is the end result that we are interested in, not the technical merit req'd.

The prizes awarded will be a copy of *Sinclair QL Paint*, or a *Talent Computer Systems GraphiQL Plus*. Programs to the same value *can be chosen instead if you prefer*. Please note, we'll be making all entries public domain for free distibution. Please give us a ring if you do not understand what this means in practice.

ISSUE 1 WINNER NOW ANNOUNCED

In issue 1, we ran a competition in which we gave readers *five* features of the QL, and asked you all to put them in order of importance. The winner was judged to be the order that most QL users put them in. The prize was a copy of *"SPEEDSCREEN"* by Creative Codeworks. Although we did not have a large number of entries, there was a clear winning order. This was: B,D,A,E,C. Mr. Palmer of Nottingham won, and chose have *SPEEDSCREEN*.

REPLY BEFORE ISSUE 5 TO ENTER!

BENEFITS IN STORE

THE SPECIAL DEALS FOR READERS THAT WE HAVE ARRANGED

QL S.U.B. 75p £

THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF QL SUPER USER BUREAU

CATALOGUE AND PRICELIST.

2 HARDWARE All the best QL hardware at the best price.
4 PERIPHERALS If it plugs into the QL/Thor it's here.
5 APPLICATIONS We only stock the best QL programs.
7 BUSINESS Make your QL pay for itself with these items.
8 GRAPHICS For Graphics or CAD the QL is a fine tool.
10 PROGRAMMING As programmers, we supply the range.
13 UTILITIES These programs enhance the use of your QL.
18 ENTERTAINMENT Everyone likes a break sometimes.
20 ADVENTURES Escape to exciting new fantasy worlds.
21 ARCADE GAMES If you like fast action, look here.
23 CONVENIENCE Make using your computer a pleasure.
24 CONSUMABLES Those products a QL needs to have.
25 MISCELLANEOUS Bits'n'pieces we could not class.
26 SPARES OR REPAIRS Do it yourself repairs.
27 THE INDEX How to find out what that product does.

We reserve the right to change prices and specifications without notice at any time.

The above miniature illustration of a catalogue and pricelist should be a close approximation of the real thing by the time you read this. Get one...

At last! We've now done what we've been trying to do for ages... (Apart from publish this magazine.) We have designed and compiled the ultimate guide to the QL, Thor, life, and the universe. (Add on modules for the last two will be available very shortly for later delivery by lorry in 64 volume sets. (Ok, so we tried to bring a little humour to the catalogue and pricelist too.) If you don't have a copy, *please* give us a ring or drop us a line, and we will be all too happy to drop a a copy in the post to you now.

The catalogue and pricelist isn't just a method of us trying to persuade you to part with lots of your hard earned cash. You should know it isn't our style...

No, what it is, is a guide to the QL/Thor hardware/software scene that should help you, (even prevent you!) from making those buying blunders that we've all made. You know, that QL program that you bought because you thought it would make your washing machine do the dishes too, and when it arrived, it needed 512k of expansion RAM, (which it didn't say in the advert) and was supplied on 5.25" disk. So, after spending a small fortune on expansions to run it, you start it up, and *catastrophy!* It breaks all the saucers from the 24 piece set of china crockery your mother gave you as a wedding gift... *On phoning the supplier*, you discover a *special version* (that works on china crockery,) will be available soon for just £25.

The catalogue and pricelist is categorised by product type and there is an index by name giving type. Each product is given a short description, and details on supplier, needs, prices, and in the next edition, hates, and available media details. Bravo...!

SORRY CASH WITH ORDER ONLY

READER EXCHANGE?

The page representing individuals and other QL clubs...

We originally planned this section as a "sales and wants" type area for users to use *free of charge*. However, time has proved that we neither have the space, nor the schedule for this type of feature. Instead, this page will be used initially for a list of *other QL organisations that offer support*, and later, hopefully, next issue, a "speakers' corner" for clubs, QVIEW bulletin board sysops *(SYStem OPerators)*, and people with interests that we do not cover in this magazine, such as hardware modifications etc., etc..

The following is a list of the clubs that we know of *so far...* If you in any of the following, then please make sure that the organisers have been in contact with us. We will be giving a ¼ page to each club or organisation to what they do, and offer!

The following is a list of the groups that we have been told about or have already contacted. It is by no means complete- there's no insult intended to groups not listed- we probably just don't know about them.

Australian QL User Group, Belgium QL User Group, Finnish QL User Group, German Professional User Group, Norwegian QL User Group, "QLAVE" Spanish QL user group, "QLUB of Norway", "QL Contact France", "QL Friendly Club", "QL Egabro" Spanish QL user group, us- "QL SUB" worldwide QL user group, "QUANTA", worldwide QL user group, "QUASAR" Dutch/German/French? QL user group, "Sin-QL-Air" Dutch QL user group, Swedish QL User Group, and more!

If you want the address, (or details if we have any,) of any group, then please send us a SAE or international reply coupon. We have not made any contact with some groups so we cannot necessarily recommend them at all.

Sales/wants using *"The Register"*

As we explained in the last issue, we are now operating a new idea for "sales and wants" to readers. It is both more efficient, and more convenient for potential buyer and vendor. To clear up confusion between READER EXCHANGE and the new sales or wants section, it will be known as *"THE REGISTER"*. Better, eh?

It works like this... If you have something to sell, or want to buy something, you send us two first class stamps, and we'll put you on our list. *We have had to change the system now, because quite a number of you told us you did not think it was a very good one before!* Now, what we will do is make a list of items and send it out direct. The list will be made at regular intervals, no longer than 1 month. NB 2 stamps, 1 list.

SEND *YOUR* ADVERTS OR ARTICLES

Adventurous Goings On with QL

Welcome to this, the second of the columns I have written for "QL SUB". As this is being written before the first column has been distributed I'm working in the dark as to whether this column is what people want. Please write in!

There have been some interesting developments on the QL front for adventurers recently. Digital Precision have released an improved version of APT, called ACT, for the princely sum of £49.95. This is only available on disk. I hope that Steve Sutton, the writer will be letting us know what improvements he has made over the original APT system. Bundled with ACT is Imagine, Steve's adventure written with ACT. If you want this cheap you'll have to subscribe to "QLAF"!

New adventures that have been made available include "The Blag", which is a detective adventure/simulation, which involves the player trying to solve a robbery. Gap Software are publishing this for £15.00. Having seen a preview copy this looks very neat and has a useful device of a "notebook" into which you can save notes on mdv/disk.

Alan Pemberton's "From the Tower of Valagon" is available from CGH Services for £6.00 (or less if you provide the media). This is a text adventure. CGH will also publish his "Starplod", which is an icon-driven graphic adventure, with no player text input, so there'll be no vocabulary problems, only logical ones. Despite the name this won't be a galactic detective scenario. Cost will be £10 (but less to QLAF subscribers.)

"The Prawn" should be available from Talent+ by the time you read this- apparently some delays with the manual have held things up. (Ed, In stock.)

EEC Ltd have limited supplies of "The Prawn" at just £9.95. So if your copies have worn out or you've never been able to get hold of one, now is your chance.

Another golden oldie to resurface is Games Workshop's "D-Day". Criticised on its first release, Strongs of Peniel, Carmarthen, Dyfed, have located some old stock and are selling it at the, I think excessive price of £19.00. Price includes a cloning mdv_ to allow backup copies to be done. The bad news is that it crashes in certain circumstances, is incompatible with disk interfaces and extra memory, and if that wasn't bad enough, it is slow and the computer opponent is pretty daft at times. The good news is that someone has been working on fixing all the bugs. At the time of writing, memory and interface problems were solved, a cursor enabled at all times and things speeded up.

Stuck with "ZKUL"? Salvation at last...

One of the oldest of the QL adventures is Talent "Zkul", and, judging by the letters received by in connection with QLAF, it is one that has stumped many players in the past few years. QLAF will be publishing a complete set of maps in the next 3 issues (4-6). However, there are still many problems that hold people up. So I'll see if I can give "QL SUB" readers some hints-

1) The shovel is needed to dig twice in the "tookee" room to find a way out of the complex and later to find a crown.
2) The armour may be dwarfen but you need it more than the dwarves. They do appreciate gifts, and will provide food in exchange, if you look for it.
3) The axe will not only dispose of the madman, but also the thief. It will be needed to cut the drawbridge rope.
4) The mirror will be needed to get past Medusa- or else you'll get stoned.
5) The bonsai tree will be a useful aid if given fresh water.
6) The horn is treasure, if you use it, you'll blow it!
7) Dipping the lead into the acidic pit with the tongs will change it to gold.
8) You will find that eating wholesome food increases your strike rate.
9) To paddle the boat you need to get in it with an oak.
10) The chasm has a rope bridge across it, hidden in the mist. You'll need to jump over the middle section to get across.
11) When entering the maze to the NE of the long hall, take great care when mapping. It can be done- you should find the tongs here, and a little square room. (Ed, What, our office?)
12) There is a useful source of fuel under the drawbridge. Leave it under the dangling rope and you can always come back for more. A little digging should also reveal some treasure.
13) An ice wall provides both a welcome breather, and will melt for a patient explorer, but do make sure your boat is free to float first.
14) When traversing underground water ways you'll need your transport even on dry land.
15) A domed city awaits the persevering explorer, but touching a scroll too soon, will destroy it.

Well those hints, drawn from Malcolm Smith's "ZKUL" maps, should help some adventurers. If you need more help, do write in. However, if you are really interested in adventures, you could do worse than subscribe to QL Adventurers' Forum from CGH Services.

By Richard Alexander, "QLAF" Editor, CGH Services, Cwm Gwenn Hall, Pencader, Dyfed, Cymru SA39 9HA. Tel: 055-934-574

S.D. MicroSystems

This issue we interview Steve Denson, boss of SD Microsystems, suppliers of a range of quality business software.

Ed, Why did you first buy your QL?

I was a Spectrum owner, so the QL was a logical progression, but I didn't actually buy one until summer 1986. At that time, the QL was being bundled with a cheap thermal printer (which I still use for listings), all for £150. It was too good a bargain to miss, such a good computer at such a low price. It was the best move I ever made. (Ed, Most readers would agree.)

Ed, Why did you start to support QLs?

When I surveyed the QL scene I discovered that it was rather elitist. I spotted a gap in the market for a small business package which was cheap to buy and simple to use. Thus version one of the 'Small Traders Pack' was born. I like to think that our software has improved greatly since those early days, whilst retaining it's inherent simplicity in operation.

Ed, Why support the QL or compatibles instead of the ubiquitous IBM clones?

That's easy to answer. The QL is a computer with character. I find mainstream business machines utterly boring. They all look the same, have similar specifications and run under a standard operating system, MSDOS. One can draw an analogy with modern, mass-produced cars. They all have a virtually identical shape. You have to look at the badge on the front to see what the make is! And yet the general public is still expected to get excited by the adverts and their silly slogans. Design has become homogenised. The QL, on the other hand, has it's own operating system, QDOS and a unique storage media, the microdrive. We all know it's a bit quirky but this adds to the overall charm. The QL is a machine for individualists those people who don't wish to follow the computing crowd.

Ed, Other than for programming, what else do you use your QL or Thor for? As a supplier of business packages for the QL, I presume you do your own accounts, with your own QL packages.

Absolutely. You have to practise what you preach, after all! We use our own Small Trader software to run the accounts, maintain our mailing list and do the invoicing. The Psion packages are very useful for correspondence, documentation, filing, budgeting and so on. Our own

sales catalogues are produced on Front Page Extra, the DTP, which is also very good for designing adverts, manual covers etc. Apart from serious useage, I like to relax with the occasional game of computer chess, darts and even old-fashioned space invader shoot'm'ups. Very therapeutic after a hard day's codeing...!)

Ed, How do you see the QL being used in future and what do you anticipate yours being used for in future Steve?

I think that the new IBM emulator has got to make a difference, but I don't regard the development as being that revolutionary. After all, if people wanted to conform to the industry standard they'd have bought an IBM clone in the first place.

Where it will come in useful, of course, is in linking the large office computer to the home micro. I must tell you, however, that I won't be queueing up to use the labyrinthine Wordstar on my QL. Give me Quill, any day. To me, small is beautiful, as is simplicity. (Ed, Wordstar is horrid.)

On a more personal note, I shall be continuing with my own brand of 'alternative' business computing.

Ed, What would you like to do with your QL that you can't at the moment?

Make some money, for a change!

Ed, What, if any, do you think are the shortcomings of the QL, and the QL compatible market are present?

When I got my first QL I was suprised that a machine which was launched at the small business sector should lack proper print formatting and universal error-trapping. In other words, it has no PRINT_USING or ON_ERROR commands... The purists will say "Oh that's all taken care of by such & such a toolkit." The fact is however, that if one is releasing a commercial program, one cannot assume that everyone else has the same utilities. Many of our customers, especially those new to the market, have only the basic QL and it's our job to cater for these as well as users with "Rolls-Royce" systems with every conceivable add-on. Therefore you have to write special routines to replace the missing commands which really should have been built-in to superbasic, at least on the later ROMs, say JM/JS. (Ed, or MG)

Ed, As a purist, QJump Toolkit 2 gives the QL the desired PRINT_USING command but JS/MG WHEN ERRor remains "dodgy".

41

by Steve Denson

As far as the QL market is concerned, the only thing missing is a new QL. Apart from that, there is a very wide range of software & hardware.

Ed, Who buys most of your products?

The majority of our present clients are obviously small business people. There is a great diversity of trades and professions, a real cross-section of our society. Many are first-time business users; maybe they've bought a cheap, second-hand QL and they are eager to see how they can use it in their business. I get some real job satisfaction from being able to help them discover what a great time-saver a computer can be. For example, in reducing hours of boring book-keeping to maybe a few minutes a week.

Like me, most customers are more interested in the practical side of computing rather than the technical. E.G. in what the machine can actually do and not so much how it does it.

Ed, How do you see the future of the QL and "Thor" markets developing?

"Crystal-ball gazing" is a hazardous occupation. You can make yourself look rather foolish by trying to predict the future. I mean, according to Sir Clive, for whom I have the greatest respect, we should all have been racing around in his electric cars by now. Ho Hum. I am certain of this however, 1000s of QLs will still be in use well into the 1990s. In fact, if you interview me again in ten years time, I suspect that I shall still be involved in some way with the QL because I love the machine anyway. Unless, of course, I disappear somewhere along the way, which QL folk seem to have a strange habit of doing! (Ed, Peter Chambers where are you?)

I never really saw the "Thor" as the logical upgrade path for QL users. It was too expensive and too elitist. Even the basic "Thor 1" was around £600 not including the monitor. And CST seemed to market it almost as a scientific machine. We are a business software house, albeit at the "low end" of the market, yet very few of our customers own a "Thor". A very tiny percentage. Actually, CST were just down the road from us, in Stevenage, but I never did get around to contacting them before they re-located to Denmark or wherever. There just wasn't the demand got it.

The "Futura" is a might-have-been story. Which leaves us with the good old QL, unless someone comes up with a new compatible... It's a great pity that Focus' "QL World" has gone on to subscription only. It has turned the market into virtually a closed shop. I think the move was unnecessary. The publishers could have incorporated the Cambridge Z88 and Psion Organiser into "QL World" magazine and thus broadened it's readership without losing the necessary Sinclair QL connection.

Going back to Sir Clive, another comment he made rings very true. He said that ten years, looking forward, is a very long time, but that in retrospect, it's rather a short span. In other words, things don't change as quickly as we might believe they do. For this reason, I'm confident that the QL will go on for years yet.

Ed, I presume you have new programs in the pipeline- are they for the QL?

Well, we've just released the "Stock Accounting System", an integrated stock control and invoicing package for expanded QLs. I would describe it as a bit of a "business blockbuster".

We've also started the "Small Trader Club" which is intended to provide specialist back-up for our business users. It's really an extension of our Small Trader software and as such is in no way competition to S.U.B., which is an all-round support service for QL users. (Ed, It's true too!)

In addition, we do have some other projects in the pipeline. I'd prefer to keep them under wraps for the time being except to say that the new packages will be for (home/business) management, as you might expect from us. I'm never short of new ideas, though, and they should contain some interesting features. (Ed, As ever.)

Ed, Is there anything I've not asked, or anything that you want to add to your comments before we "close"?

Only this. We share the same objectives as QL S.U.B. in wanting to keep the QL flag flying for as long as is possible, and in offering our customers, or members, the very best service. If any reader is thinking of going over to another "format", I would advise them to think again. Whatever your computing interest, the QL still offers users the best value around. (Ed, Our new QLs cost £130)

Ed, Thank you for your comments- I have to say Steve that you are a man very much after my own heart when it comes to the QL market and users. We will be there when nobody else is...

Backspace No4
Old Languages

Languages are a strange sort of thing in my opinion. We all need to be able to use at least one to communicate, whether it be spoken, written, or put over by gestures, and whether it is human, animal, computer, or whatever. Clearly, languages are necessary for communication and would be irrelevent without the need for it. An obvious point, maybe worth thinking about.

Naturally, I have decided to take a look at how I see languages evolving in the use of computers, and maybe even in the greater world in general. I am not an expert on languages, and so I will probably offend some of you but I am here as a SUB contributor to provoke thought, not peace of mind...

What is a language? Well looking in the pocket dictionary in the office, I discover that language is a noun; speech; particular form of speech of nation, race, profession etc.; any symbols, gestures expressing meaning. That covers most interpretations...

Discounting the first part, speech, we look at the description again. It seems that the better interpretation is the second part, the more general. "any symbols, gestures expressing meaning." Clearly most languages in use on the planet by humans allow some form of record to be made of language, and of communications between them.

It is not the case, however, with any other animals on the planet. Only man has found the need to record messages for later recovery, and has found a set of symbols to do so. Some people would say that this is because only man (homo sapiens, I'm not sexist) has got a sense of time, a sense of past and future, and a need to deal with it. Do animals communicate only in the present tense? Logic says they must!

We shall in view of this, narrow our discussion down to the area of most interest— that of languages that are specifically designed for conveying data in symbolic form from a to b, or recording data for future reference. An interesting point occurs to me— whenever you write, type, or record anything, you are planning for the future, planning on needing it again. Obvious maybe, but quite amazing...

As the amount of communication that cannot be carried out between two or more individuals has increased, so has the need to develop better, and faster methods of communicating. It was the need to process data, and in particular secret data that required the development of computer systems.

Languages are living things, changing and mutating as necessary to suite as the circumstances of users change. It is interesting to observe the updates that COBOL and FORTRAN (the Latin and Greek of computer languages), have received over the years, and how they have influenced subsequent languages. A language that cannot change is dead and a language that changes too often cannot gain the following to survive.

Will we see computer languages dying off in years to come? Will BASIC, the much abused, and misused workhorse of computer languages finally die? Will the new breed such as Modula 2, and C finally kill-off their predecessors? If such things can happen despite the large number of users, can the same thing happen to natural languages?

To benefit the communication process, banking, and all international trade services have a new "standard" for communications using computers. Soon to be gone, forever, are the millions of shipping notes that used to travel the world daily. The stock market is now using completely computerised methods of trading, and more and more shops are using electronic point of sale terminals. Furthermore, we may soon do trading only through cards.

Will we see the day when computer based products are so standard that they require a "standard" natural language, and are so widespread in their new friendly and easy to use guise that all machines and equipment are able to talk to each other, but not necessarily to the human users.

Could it even happen that with the use of electronic communication being fundamental to every area of business humans could need to use languages suitable for computers, rather than the very expensive alternative?

After all, if a computer system is designed to talk in English, or maybe Japanese, then it is a waste of time to make it talk in French, Indian, Jamaican, and so on too. Is it not much better to teach children a new universal language that all computers (and humans), can understand? It may become possible, but is it worth it?

After all, to carry the theory to the extreme, if everyone is going to be working from home, and communicating via terminals, then they won't really need to use a traditional language. Already many languages in the third world have all disappeared, being replaced by various English dialects.

Could you see a time when there's no plural of language except in history? Me? Perhaps. A Reassuring thought is that while there are computers, you will always have plenty of "jargon" to make yourselves misunderstood...

STOP PRESS!

INFORMATION ABOUT THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS AT S.U.B.

QL SUB REPAIRS INCLUDING YEAR GUARANTEE ONLY £33 TO MEMBERS £38 NON MEMBER THE BEST VALUE

Text 87 Upgraded'

It is typical that just as I put the finishing words to the review of the Text87 package, that I have received an updated copy of Text87 from Fred Toussi. The updates also includes the latest version of Fountext, and Founted, and from the quick glances that I have been able to have at the manual, it would seem that a number of moans that I made in my review have already been rectified, (as a result of popular demand,) and that Text87 version 2 is a great upgrade.

I will endeavor to examine it in the next two issues- as I will be using Text87 extensively in future for the production of "QL SUB"- I anticipate being able to provide greater help with it than we have done up to now.

Just a little Editor's Note

You will be pleased to hear that the next issue will be with you on-time, or sooner, unless something really unexpected crops-up. I already have it almost complete, so once the printers have it everything should go smoothly. The delay in the publication of this one was due to a nasty rumour circulated by an individual, or individuals, who obviously didn't like us surviving. Although it is probably best to ignore such matters, I feel that as it almost lead to "QL SUB" collapsing, due to lack of support over a 3 month period, directly related to it according to may people who have discovered the real situation and told us when and how they heard the story. We have no comeback on those spreading the rumour, so all we can do is continue to advertise, and get on with the job.

The situation regarding staff at "QL SUB" has now changed for the better, although publication was too far progressed to alter the information given inside. We now have more staff, and there are other new developments you will be told about very shortly.

REMEMBER, WE ARE EASY TO CALL!

ENQUIRIES 9AM..5PM, MON TO FRI. HELPLINE, 1PM..8PM SUN TO THU. TELEPHONE 0388 450610 / 450658, ANSWERPHONE ON 0388 450610. OTHER METHODS ARE: FAX: 0388 609845, PRESTEL MBX: 219998590, TELEX: 934999, TXLINK G, QUOTING REFERENCE NO: 219998590.

S.U.B., PO BOX 3, SHILDON, DL4 2LW.